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Fifty-eighth session

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New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I first call on His Excellency The Honourable Louis Straker, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Straker (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): The fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly affords me the special privilege, honour and pleasure of congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly. As a distinguished son of our neighbouring island, Saint Lucia, you do great honour to your country and to the whole Caribbean Community family. I take great pride in what you, Sir, a fellow Foreign Minister and my dear friend, have accomplished, and trust that, under your astute leadership, this fifty-eighth session will chart the right course, which will enable the Organization to fulfil the expectations of mankind for a secure, peaceful and prosperous world. Who knoweth but that by some divine order you have come to the presidency of this body at such a time as this.

Let me first express, on behalf of the Government and people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, deepest sympathy to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the entire United Nations family on the loss of Sergio Vieira de Mello and other United Nations personnel in the terrorist attack in Baghdad. Those dedicated United Nations workers strived for peace and justice for the people of the world. They lived for that cause, and, tragically, they gave their lives for that cause. We share the pain of this loss and the bewilderment over it, and pay tribute to all those United Nations staff members who put duty before self in the service of mankind.

My Government acknowledges with appreciation the sterling work being done in difficult conditions all over the developing world by United Nations agencies, from peacekeeping and the restoration of democracy to development cooperation and humanitarian aid. I also wish to single out for particular mention the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Population Fund. We urge Member States to continue to give support and assistance to these organizations, which make such a difference, particularly in the lives of women and children, in the poorest sectors of the world.

We have heard speaker after speaker, over the course of the past week, suggesting that the United Nations is in crisis. Many have proposed solutions for the rectification of this unhappy state of affairs. It is my Government's contention that the General Assembly needs to retake its place as the central platform of the Organization, because it is the only truly democratic arm of the United Nations. In this regard, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines intends to participate fully in the ongoing debate on reform which will be led by you, Mr. President, and we are hopeful that, with your able guidance, some real progress can

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be made in this fifty-eighth session. Of particular concern to small missions like my own is the volume and variety of work between September and December every year. The way the work of the General Assembly is designed makes it difficult for us to make the kind of contribution that we would wish for the effective and efficient operation of the Organization. The Secretary-General said in his report on the revitalization of the General Assembly:

> "The proliferation of meetings and official documents places excessive demands on both the Secretariat and Member States. Many smaller Member States now find it practically impossible to play a meaningful role in even the most crucial activities of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council" (*A/57/387, para. 23*).

If the work of the General Assembly could be redesigned so as to spread the work load more evenly throughout the calendar year, it would enable small missions like that of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to participate fully in the work of the Organization.

The debate on the reform of the Security Council is fraught with many difficulties and challenges. It is my Government's view that the simple enlargement of the representation on the Security Council may not by itself necessarily lead to greater democratization of that body. No matter how many reform theorems are advanced, the will has to come from the permanent members of the Council that wield the veto. My Government has already urged an increase in the membership of the Council, both permanent and non-permanent, but it seems to us that as long as the veto continues to exist, the Council will not be truly representative of the wishes of the States Members of this Organization and multinational diplomacy will be endangered. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines makes so bold as to say that the solution may also well lie in the removal of the power of veto, to allow for more democracy, greater participation, openness and transparency. Only then, perhaps, will this Organization regain its integrity and respect.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines cherishes the relationships that it enjoys with all countries, both large and small, represented here at the United Nations. The United Nations Charter confers that freedom of representation on all peace-loving and democratic States. Yet my country continues to be deeply troubled that Taiwan is still being excluded from this body.

While we seek to make the United Nations more efficient and effective through much-needed reform, we can advance the cause and the call for reform by making the United Nations more inclusive through the admission to membership of Taiwan and its 23 million people, who have no voice in the United Nations. Taiwan is an exemplary global citizen that maintains friendly relations with almost every country in the world. We would wish for this Organization to be the catalyst that promotes constructive dialogue and friendly engagement so that the Taiwan situation can be resolved in a peaceful, just and equitable way to the benefit of the entire global family.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is proud to be a State party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). We believe in the fundamental role that the ICC has to play in our collective quest for peace and the promotion of the rule of law and justice. We are determined to uphold its integrity.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is proud of our contribution to the emerging Caribbean civilization. Let me quote from a recent speech by our Prime Minister, The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves:

> "The reassembling of the African, Asiatic and European fragments forms the basis of our very Caribbean civilization itself, which is at once shaped and yet evolving. Fundamentally, too, our Caribbean civilization, like all civilizations, has been built on labour — the producers — and the contours of the society fashioned by the social organization of labour".

My small country has made the painful transformation from colonialism to independent democracy in 25 short years. Our people chose not the path leading to war and conflict, but rather opted for the highway of democracy, racial harmony and respect for human rights conducting us to peace, tranquillity and future prosperity. But we are hampered in our quest. My country, like others in the region, is in danger of losing an entire generation to the scourge of HIV/AIDS. We need the help of the international community in the fight against this dreaded disease for the preservation of our society.

Our banana industry, which is the engine that drives our economy, is shortly to succumb to the greed

of certain multinational companies, with the active assistance of the World Trade Organization. Without the banana industry, whose doomsday rapidly approaches, our hardworking peasant farmers will become just another casualty of globalization. The European Union mandates that its sugar farmers get paid 50 euros per tonne — or five times the world market price. Their farmers then dump their product on the market, thus depressing prices for farmers elsewhere. So we may shortly have to bid farewell to the sugar industries of developing nations like Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Mozambique and Guatemala. The United States of America spends more than $3 billion dollars of its taxpayers' money every year to subsidize its cotton growers. This, naturally, signals death to the cotton farmers of Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali, Chad and other developing nations. How can the developed world, which continues to subsidize its farmers and which touts globalization as the cure for all economic ills, continue defending the indefensible?

Cancún, as we all now know, was an abysmal failure. We went there hoping to be led into the Promised Land — only to find ourselves lost and abandoned in the wilderness. We will continue our crusade for economic stability and democratic harmony in our country, but it is self-evident that we need the help of the developed part of the world in order to be viable. It will benefit no one if small countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are marginalized and left to flounder. We are a vulnerable country. The reasons why small island developing States are especially vulnerable are too well known to be repeated here. Our requests for special and differential treatment in the WTO are completely justified and, for the most part, largely ignored.

My Government is cognizant of the fact that terrorism threatens us all. We are therefore fully engaged in the process of implementing Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) — a process which has stretched our limited resources. The oft-repeated promises of help in this process are proving to be, like so many other promises made within these hallowed halls, just that — promises. Yet we read with grave concern in the *New York Times* just last week that, between them, two of the giants of this Organization export arms worth nearly $20 billion every year — the majority, of course, to developing nations. What do arms do in developing nations? They are the fuel that feeds the flames of conflict and terrorism.

Unless we can collectively find the courage and wisdom to tackle the problems of poverty, disease and despair, all the weapons in the world will not prevent the spread of terrorism. We need to move beyond using the United Nations as a talk shop and come together as responsible nations to tackle the root causes of terrorism.

The security which the poorer nations of the world desire is obtained not through the force of arms, but in relief from burdensome debt, employment opportunities, shelter, food, clean water, a healthy environment and access to medical care and life-giving drugs.

Despite its imperfections, the United Nations is the forum that gives us hope. Let us work together so that we can bequeath to our children and to our children's children an Organization that can be used, in the words of the Secretary-General, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, to establish the basic conditions for justice and the rule of law and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. László Kovács, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary.

Mr. Kovács (Hungary): Allow me to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. You may rest assured of my delegation's full support in the discharge of your important responsibilities.

It is my painful duty to pay, along with so many of us, a tribute to the memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his associates, who sacrificed their lives for the people of Iraq in the service of peace and the United Nations. Our heart goes out to the families of the victims of that cowardly terrorist act.

The world was shocked and saddened when a most respected colleague, and a close friend of mine, the late Anna Lindh, the Swedish Foreign Minister, fell victim to a senseless act of crime in Stockholm. Her vision of the world and her deep commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations will continue to be a source of inspiration to all of us.

Hungary aligned itself with the statement delivered by the presidency of the European Union during the general debate and fully supports it.

We live in a world of great opportunities and serious challenges. It is in this context that global problems require global and concerted solutions. To that effect, we must use the potentials of the United Nations to make the best use of opportunities at hand. In that respect, maintaining or restoring peace and stability, non-proliferation, development and human rights are in the focus of attention of the international community. International terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, grave armed internal conflicts, poverty and illegal migration constitute enormous challenges to all of us.

Hungary remains strongly committed to multilateral institutions. We are firmly convinced that the United Nations can and should play a major role in meeting the multifaceted and ever growing challenges of our contemporary world. We, for our part, are deeply devoted to assisting that role. Along with our partners in the European Union, we are more than prepared to strengthen the United Nations as a unique instrument of a strong multilateral system to tackle global and regional issues for the sake of a safer and more secure world. We will spare no effort to take an active part in maintaining peace and security, enhancing the non-proliferation regimes, protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and establishing international standards.

The global fight against international terrorism must remain a major priority of the United Nations. In this context, we support the full and effective implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Hungary is keenly interested in widening the scope of multilateral instruments in the fight against terrorism.

After the success of the coalition forces in bringing freedom and the opportunities of democracy in Iraq, we have to turn our attention to the reconstruction and development of that long-suffering country. Hungary is strongly committed to supporting the Iraqi people. Our fellow Hungarians are serving with the coalition forces. We will also attend the donors conference in Madrid later this fall.

We are closely following developments regarding the United Nations assumption of an ever-increasing role in Iraq. I would like to stress that the United Nations has to assume its share of the work both in restoring the sovereignty of Iraq and in the reconstruction process. I believe that our Organization, with ample experience elsewhere, can play a significant role in the establishment of democratic institutions, the rule of law, respect for human rights and election-monitoring. We are studying intensively our possible contributions to this process. For the time being, though, our priority must be the stabilization of the security situation in Iraq and the normalization of day-to-day life.

Hungary is deeply concerned by the grave and deteriorating situation in the Middle East. We believe that the implementation of the road map is the only framework for reaching a political settlement. An effective and credible monitoring mechanism is of critical importance to that effect. The Quartet should carry on with its mission in the peace process. We call upon both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to dedicate all their efforts to the full and unconditional implementation of the road map.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. The Government of Afghanistan deserves our assistance and attention. Terrorist acts and illicit drug-trafficking are causes for serious concern. I am confident that, with the unwavering support of the international community, Afghanistan will soon be a better place for the Afghan people.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, together with the means of their delivery, is a growing and serious threat to international peace and security. The danger of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the hands of terrorist groups and States — which are a menace to our world — represents new major security challenges, against which we must act together in a resolute manner, both regionally and globally.

Earlier this year, the European Union (EU) adopted a very important and far-reaching Declaration on Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Hungary will work hard with its partners in the EU towards the effective implementation of that new instrument and of the recently agreed EU Action Plan.

In the current world security environment, the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) needs to be reinforced. We call on the States remaining outside the NPT to accede to it

unconditionally and to accept the nearly universal norms of nuclear non-proliferation.

Revelations about large-scale nuclear programmes and the failure to provide sufficient explanations as to their purpose and nature have given rise to legitimate concerns on the part of the international community. There is a growing recognition — shared by Hungary — that those programmes imply serious proliferation risks as well.

We view the first follow-up meeting of the States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), held at Geneva in August this year, as encouraging. The participants rightly focused on practical actions. We look forward to seeing further progress in strengthening national implementation of the BWC at the next meeting, in November.

Hungary remains strongly committed to the international protection and promotion of human rights and of fundamental freedoms, including the rights of minorities. The United Nations is the only universal Organization dealing with worldwide standards-setting, protecting human rights and addressing violations of human rights in individual Member States. All those efforts deserve our unqualified support.

Hungary continues to attach particular importance to the protection of the rights of minorities. Regional instruments aimed at improving the situation of national and ethnic minorities have already been adopted to that end without major difficulties. A universal instrument on the rights of minorities has yet to be elaborated. We believe that, given the necessary political will on the part of Member States, the United Nations will be able to fill that gap through an international minority protection system. The more effectively we act, the more beneficial the service that we will be able to provide with respect to protecting vulnerable minority groups through standards and norms.

Hungary stands ready and is willing to join others in redoubling our efforts with regard to strengthening the United Nations system. Multilateral institutions are in serious need of reform, if they are to live up to the expectations of the fast-changing political and economic landscape of our times. The United Nations cannot be an exception to that.

The President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Frederick Mitchell, Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Public Service of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Mr. Mitchell (Bahamas): It is my distinct honour, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Government and the people of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this, its fifty-eighth session. We share in the celebration of the election of a distinguished son of the Caribbean to steer the course of this body for the next year. My delegation pledges its full support to you and to the other members of the Bureau in the performance of that challenging task. I also take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessor, from the Czech Republic, for his outstanding leadership of the fifty-seventh session. In addition, I should like to greet and pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who continues to serve with great distinction, honour and exceptional courage. My delegation salutes the Secretary-General for the tremendous amount of work he has undertaken since we last convened this body.

I also wish to pause at this time to pay tribute to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the late Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and to all other United Nations staff members who were killed or wounded in the deadly bombings of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August and 22 September 2003. We feel that loss most deeply. For us, the United Nations is paramount in ensuring the rule of law and justice in an increasingly complex world. An attack on the United Nations is an attack on the principles that bind us together as an international community. We must stand firm against efforts to undermine those principles. There is no finer tribute to those who lost their lives than to say today: Now, more than ever before, we need the United Nations.

Such events remind us that the world is changing dramatically. It is imperative that we, as an Organization, be able to respond to those changes quickly and appropriately. The Bahamas welcomes the ongoing efforts to revitalize the General Assembly and to reform the Security Council. It is essential that those principal bodies be able to function effectively if we are to have any credibility and if we are to attain our goals of maintaining international peace, security, justice and development.

As we are all too well aware, the process of reform of the Security Council has stalled, as we

remain deadlocked over critical issues. The time has come for us to take hard decisions and to agree to a practical programme of reform that takes fully into account the need for more representative membership as well as the need for a more democratic and transparent Council. My delegation has raised those issues in a number of bilateral discussions with other concerned States, and we look forward to working with the presidency and with other delegations as we strive to rationalize the work of the entire Organization, while making it more transparent and accountable.

While the problems in our own part of the world may not have received as much international attention as have conflicts in other parts of the world, their resolution is of paramount importance to us. The Caribbean is our home, and we will spare no effort to protect it against those who seek to destabilize the region. The illegal transit of drugs, of weapons and of human beings is an affront to us and a serious challenge to our national and regional security.

The Bahamas is grateful for the support that the region has obtained from the international community in addressing these areas, but reminds Members that we need to continue to be vigilant. We urge the Assembly to enhance its cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS), as that regional body strives to find solutions to difficult problems involving territorial disputes between its member States and as it seeks to promote human rights and to consolidate the foundations of democracy in a number of those States. In that context, we welcome the OAS Special Mission for Strengthening Democracy in Haiti as a demonstration of the region's commitment to this field.

The Bahamas is strongly committed to the further strengthening of international efforts to prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism in all its ugly forms, and supports the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the elaboration of a draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism. We are continuously reviewing our national legislation in order to strengthen it in those areas, with particular emphasis on cracking down on the financing of terrorism. Even now, a terrorism bill is before our Parliament. It will further strengthen the laws that limit the ability of those who would commit such acts to obtain monies to fund their activities. The commitment of the Bahamas in this fight is unyielding.

The fight against the forces that would seek to undermine the rule of law in order to achieve political objectives has forced each country to review its commitment to freedom within and outside its borders and to determine how to protect the freedom that our citizens so dearly cherish.

Last year, in our address to the Assembly, the Bahamas reminded this body that, in our quest for security, we must not undermine the very values we want to protect, preserve and defend. But it is clear that our conventions and established and respected traditions are being challenged before our very eyes, and we must be careful to guard against this while ensuring that all of us are safe.

The Caribbean as a whole is perhaps more sensitive than any other region to these issues of change and the implications for the way of life that we enjoy, characterized as it is by an abiding respect for the privacy of the individual. It should be remembered that most of us in the region are small island developing States, which are especially vulnerable in security and economic issues. But, at the same time, our peoples are fiercely proud of our independence and the traditions of freedom connected therewith.

Nowhere is the paradox of the pressure on our now independent status more sensitive and apparent than in the exercise of a presumptive legal authority by a body of powerful, but faceless, un-elected bureaucrats, being advanced from some of the developed world's multilateral bodies, which, in the view of many, threaten to re-impose the status of dependence, without calling it so by name, and thereby undermining our economies.

In that connection, the Bahamas is particularly concerned, along with its regional neighbours, about the threats to its way of life, in particular as it is underpinned by the legitimate wealth creation in its financial services sector. There are those who argue that the financial services sectors in our region undermine economic development and wealth creation in developed States, but we maintain that the evidence shows that the wealth accumulation facilitated by the financial services sectors in the region assists in the further development and economic growth of the developed world. Our country is committed to fair and equitable trade in services on a level playing field with established rules, without ever-changing goal posts.

Over the next year, we shall endeavour to bring this matter more clearly into focus by calling, in this and other assemblies, for the convening of a global forum on the pressures being applied to small and vulnerable States in ways that threaten the independence of these countries and, which some argue, is unlawful interference in the internal affairs of a nation-State. It is imperative that any rule-making forum on these issues be open to all Member States of this body. Similarly, all rules emanating therefrom must be equitably applied.

And so, as we bring these matters to the attention of the world, we repeat the obvious. The fight against international terrorism must be a major focal point of the Assembly, as should other matters such as the fight against HIV/AIDS, the protection of the environment and the sustainable development of our fragile ecosystems.

The Bahamas is committed to fighting on all of these fronts. It is especially concerned about the future of the world's children and young people, as HIV/AIDS threatens to undermine decades and centuries of progress in healthcare and in developing healthy populations that facilitate economic growth throughout the world. The Bahamas is a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the region. We urge the continued and unrelenting fight against the disease, to rescue the world's developing nations from the clutches of this most recent scourge. It must take all of the political will and financial power of the world's nations to ensure that the scourge is brought under control and then eliminated.

The Bahamas welcomes the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children, held from 8 to 10 May 2002. We look forward to participating in the consideration of the follow-up to its outcome at this session. It is of critical importance that we reaffirm our commitment to implementing the provisions of the outcome document, "Building a world fit for children", in the four priority areas of health, education, protection of children from abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. Our country and its people are especially concerned, even as I speak, about the safety and security, both physical and economic, of children everywhere, but in particular children in the Bahamas today, and about the need to foster an atmosphere of love and care so that they may grow into their rightful places in the adult world.

The Bahamas, as do many of the small island developing States, depends heavily on the environment, which is the natural beauty of the land, the sea and marine life. Tourism is our lifeblood. For the region, the natural environment is the primary source of sustenance and, therefore, we cannot allow our environment to be destroyed. Doing so threatens our very survival. We are, therefore, acutely aware of the challenges small island developing States face within the context of achieving sustainable development. The sustainable development of our country therefore remains of critical importance to the Government and thus, we, as a matter of the highest priority, continue to take steps to preserve and protect our environment.

We are also committed to working with all the other small island developing States and the other members of this Organization, civil society and all other concerned stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, to ensure that the Barbados Programme of Action is fully implemented. In that regard, the Bahamas welcomes the convening of the international meeting to review the Barbados Programme of Action, which is to take place in Mauritius in 2004, and we are proud to host the interregional preparatory meeting in Nassau, which will be held prior to that, from 26 to 30 January 2004. It is our hope that the renewed commitment to this international meeting by all Member States will take us a step closer to honouring our commitment to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

It is an inescapable fact that there can be no social or economic development without security. For many of us in the Caribbean in particular, this security is being undermined by the activities of those trafficking in illegal drugs and weapons. By virtue of its geographical position, the Bahamas continues to be an unwitting transit point for illegal activities, including the illicit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. What is often overlooked by those who are the consuming countries is that the Bahamas neither produces these substances, nor does it produce guns, nor is it the final destination for them.

However, as a trans-shipment point, the Bahamas is suffering from a plethora of illegal activities associated with this trade, including the deadly nexus between illicit drugs and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. These weapons, which are illegal in the Bahamas, are contributing to an increase in violent

crime in my country and they are undermining the economic and social fabric of our nation.

We, therefore, welcome the convening of the first Biennial Meeting of States to consider the Implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in July of this year. At the same time, we call on developed countries to take the same extraordinary measures they use in seeking to stop drug trafficking into their countries, to stop illegal small arms from reaching our shores from their countries.

We believe that the Charter constitutes a viable and firm foundation on which the Organization can balance and achieve its objectives — to maintain international peace and security and promote economic and social progress. I wish to reaffirm the Bahamas' commitment to the principles enshrined in that universal document, which will stand as a guiding beacon as we continue to chart a rocky, yet crucial, course towards peace, security and sustainable development for all of the world's inhabitants. While progress may seem meagre, we must not be swayed from our course, and we must remain confident that the benefits of our activities and efforts will redound to future generations. Now more than ever, the world needs the United Nations.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sergei Martynov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Martynov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): To begin, I would sincerely like to congratulate you on your election to this very important and difficult position as President of the Assembly and I wish you every success.

This year, the United Nations has come close to the most dangerous brink in its more than a half-century of history. This is not only and not so much the Iraqi crisis per se. That crisis has become but a manifestation of what has really threatened the entire system of world order created after World War II. The basis of this world order is the unconditional primacy of international law over the aspirations of individual States.

Take that away, and the world will again, as in centuries past, become hostage to the power of the mighty. This will not merely throw us backward. The beginning of the twenty-first century differs from past decades and centuries in that the existence of a single global super-Power will make the rule of the mighty global in both scale and consequence.

> "We all have to recognize — no matter how great our strength — that we must deny ourselves the license to do always as we please. ... Unless we are all willing to pay that price, no organization for world peace can accomplish its purpose".

These words, spoken by United States President Harry Truman, are as urgent today as they were back in 1945. We call upon everyone to be guided by them today as they were when our Organization was being set up.

Belarus' contribution to the creation of the United Nations and a new system of international security was one-third of our population, who gave their lives for the victory of peace over war and the victory of the coalition of the future over the coalition of the past. That is exactly why we in Belarus today sense with special urgency the danger of the erosion of a just and stable world order.

Let us preserve the coalition of the entire world for global peace. Let us not allow the Security Council, as the main body for maintaining peace and security, to be replaced by "coalitions of the willing" that use force without Council authorization. Let us not forget that only a just peace can prove to be a stable peace.

Belarus welcomes the emerging effort to return to the United Nations its legitimate role in settling the Iraq issue. This reflects the recognition that a military force or an occupying force cannot solve the problem of nation-building. We hope that this will also become recognition of the fact that a preventive war makes a poor foundation for security.

We hope that a new Security Council resolution on Iraq being worked out now will strengthen the central role of the United Nations in the earliest and urgent return to the people of Iraq of its sovereignty, its right to independently determine its political future and its right to natural resources, so that constitutional processes and later election processes can be implemented by Iraqis in the interest of Iraqis.

At the same time, Belarus is worried by the pattern that is dangerous both for the future of the United Nations and for international peace and is taking shape on the most urgent issues: the Security Council and the United Nations are ignored when

unauthorized military action is taken, and are then invited back only in the aftermath, when their authority, experience and resources are seen as essential for rebuilding a peaceful life. That is what happened in Kosovo and what is happening in Iraq today.

Belarus believes in the United Nations. We believe that it has a central role to play in the most urgent issues of today and that it cannot be replaced. We believe in the constant values and justice of the supremacy of international law and the fundamental principles of its Charter. New global challenges and threats merely reaffirm that these values are indispensable.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Belarus sees the need to modernize and adapt the United Nations mechanisms and structures to the realities of this new century.

Of special importance is the reform of the United Nations Security Council. As has been correctly noted by the Secretary-General, it is not only a question of enlarging the Council's membership. Life itself has put on the agenda of the reform process many other aspects, including the Council's capacity to react to threats to peace and security.

It is essential to achieve a reasonable balance in the interrelationship between the main United Nations bodies, inherent in its Charter. A stronger role of the General Assembly is an important direction for increasing the Organization's efficiency.

The potential of the presidency of the General Assembly is underused. As an officer elected by the entire United Nations, the President of the General Assembly can and should be called upon to serve as a catalyst and organizer in searching for solutions to the problems the world and the Organization are facing.

It is necessary to reform and improve the activities of the Economic and Social Council as the coordinator of United Nations efforts in economic, social and related areas. Having accumulated considerable experience working in the Bureau of the Council, the Republic of Belarus is ready to make a constructive contribution to these efforts. Those were exactly the considerations that guided Belarus when it proposed its candidature to Council membership for 2004-2006.

The United Nations should pay priority attention to developing international law: new realities in international politics as well as new universal world problems have to be taken into consideration. Belarus is a party to all key multilateral treaties regulating various spheres of international life. This year we have acceded to a further number of such treaties, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols.

The international fight against terrorism that unfolded after the tragic events of 11 September 2001 rightly placed the United Nations in the centre of antiterrorist efforts. The work of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee has helped in the forming of a global coalition under the aegis of the United Nations to counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

We must, however, be realistic: force alone can never eradicate the abominable phenomenon of terrorism, at least, not forever. Injustice, inequality and indifference will bring it forth again and again, just like the accumulation of electricity in the atmosphere produces a lightning bolt. The Secretary-General is right when he states that in order to maintain a genuinely global coalition for fighting terrorism the world must also see progress on other fronts of the struggle for a humane and just world order. Herein lies an important challenge for the United Nations, for permanent members of the Security Council and for all Members of the Organization.

The principal contribution of Belarus to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to conventional disarmament has been universally recognized. Our concern is therefore all the greater with regard to the gradual erosion of multilateral norms in disarmament and the stagnation of the international bodies, above all the negotiation mechanisms, in charge of international security and disarmament.

From this rostrum, we join in the appeal not to allow the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is a most important task. It should be noted, that for many years, Belarus has initiated efforts to prevent the development of new types of such weapons. However, has everything possible been done in recent years, including by the most militarily powerful States, to strengthen the multilateral non-proliferation regime in all its most important aspects? Is everything being done to that end today? An appropriate answer to that

question would be the ratification by all permanent members of the Security Council of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

The activities of multilateral bodies in the area of disarmament should be adapted to new realities. We proceed from the assumption that the United Nations should draw up a clear-cut list of priority directions in ensuring international security and generate programmes to overcome real threats to mankind. The resolutions we adopt should contain clear directives to existing forums and structures in the areas of international security, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Only with this approach will we be able to stop the devaluation of such notions as peace, security and stability.

I wish to inform delegations that Belarus has recently taken another responsible step to strengthen these values. While possessing the world's seventh largest arsenal of anti-personnel landmines, the Republic of Belarus has joined the Ottawa Convention on their prohibition. We count on international assistance in their elimination.

The norms of international law play a principled role in shaping a just international economic order. The objective of providing equal access to world markets and to the benefits of the process of globalization for all States, particularly developing countries and countries with economies in transition, has unfortunately not been achieved. That is why we urge Member States to pay unabated attention to the process of developing the norms and rules of international trade and commercial activities in the interests of common well-being.

After the recent failure of the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancún, the leading economic Powers should understand the risks of delaying the negotiations within the WTO both on the issue of new rules as well as on the problem of new membership. One should not forget that providing an opportunity to all States to use the benefits of the multilateral trading system is in the long-term interests of peace, security and stability.

I wish to inform the General Assembly that, as its contribution to ensuring access for developing countries and least developed countries to the world market, Belarus has made a decision to extend unilateral trade preferences to a large number of such States. Our country's National Centre of Technology Transfer has a high potential for innovation and is ready for extensive cooperation with all interested States. Its institutional capacities are intended to meet not only our requirements, but the interests of developing countries as well.

Let me touch upon the problem of the consequences of the largest technogenic catastrophe of the twentieth century, the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. We are grateful to the leadership of the Secretariat for its ongoing activities to mobilize international support in that direction. This year has been marked by the establishment of the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network and of the international Chernobyl Forum by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Jointly with the delegations of other affected States, we have prepared for this session a draft resolution on strengthening international cooperation and coordination of efforts in studying, mitigating and minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The document seeks to ensure the implementation of a new United Nations strategy on Chernobyl. We hope that it will be supported by all delegations.

The Republic of Belarus also proposes an initiative to hold in Minsk in 2006 an international conference timed to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The main objectives of the conference will be the search for ways to provide normal living conditions to people living in affected areas and an exchange of experiences in solving the problems of sustainable development in those regions. We invite all interested Member States and international organizations to take part in preparing and holding this event.

In the area of counteracting international crime, the fight against human trafficking and illegal drug trafficking should become one of the United Nations priorities. Our country has been actively participating in international efforts to stop the modern slave and drug trades. Located at the crossroads of the most important transportation corridors between Asia and Europe, Belarus offers efficient interaction in solving these problems with all our neighbours and, especially, with the European Union. Common efforts are needed to fight common problems; that way, everybody wins.

The global scope of problems demands a global scale of interaction involving all States without exception. Mankind made itself the master of the world after having become homo sapiens — sentient man. In order to become the master of its destiny, and not a hostage to challenges and threats, humanity should become *humanitas sapiens* — sentient humanity.

The President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Kikwete (United Republic of Tanzania): It gives me great pleasure on behalf of my delegation to extend to you, Sir, our heartfelt congratulations on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. My delegation is particularly pleased at the way you have been conducting the work of the Assembly thus far. The skills and experience that you bring to the Assembly have been amply proven in the past days of our deliberations. I wish to assure you of the continued support and cooperation of my delegation.

Let me use this opportunity to congratulate your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for a job well done during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

In the same vein, I wish to pay tribute to our illustrious Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his valiant efforts in bringing the United Nations closer to the people and in fostering peace and development around the world. He is discharging the functions of his high office in such a manner that he has won the hearts and minds of many people the world over.

This fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly is being held at a very momentous time in the history of the United Nations — a time when multilateralism is facing serious threats and a time when the United Nations, the main embodiment of multilateralism, has been confronting formidable challenges. Never in history have the relevance and mandate of the United Nations been put to a greater test as in the past few months.

Certainly, the tumultuous events of the past months have shaken the very foundation of our Organization, but fortunately have not broken it. We are comforted by the fact that the United Nations has withstood the test of time and emerged as not only relevant, but indispensable in keeping world peace. Likewise, multilateralism has stood out as the only hope for all peoples. As we celebrate the United Nations and its success, we should always remember that it is our solidarity and steadfast adherence to the ideals of the United Nations that have made our Organization survive the trials and turbulence of the past year.

I assure the Assembly that the Government and people of the United Republic of Tanzania take pride in Tanzania's membership of the United Nations. We remain committed to its ideals and ready to work tirelessly towards its advancement, strengthening and success.

Peace and security still eludes the world, as guns and explosives continue to thunder and cries of agony continue to be heard across the continents. These days, violations of human rights have become common occurrences, even among the developed countries of the world. Wars continue to rage, with Africa and Asia, sadly, claiming the largest share. Acts of terror, too, continue to resonate all over the world. Since the last General Assembly session, for example, terrorists have struck in 12 countries.

As a country that has been a victim of international terrorism, Tanzania condemns terrorism, whatever the reason and wherever it takes place. My Government remains committed to the war against terror. In this regard, we will continue to cooperate with world Governments and institutions of goodwill to defeat terrorism. I take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that Tanzania has ratified all the major anti-terrorism protocols. We have also enacted a comprehensive legislation to deal with terrorism and terrorist acts in our country.

It is very saddening to note that even the United Nations has become a target of terrorist attacks, as exemplified by the recent tragic bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, which resulted in the death of 23 United Nations staff members, including the charismatic diplomat and chief of mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello and his chief of staff, Nadia Younes. Once again, we condemn this senseless act, while joining in mourning our fallen heroes. They died for the United Nations. They risked their lives and died for a just cause, for which they will be remembered for ever in the history of our Organization. Tanzania proposes that the United Nations erect a fitting memorial in their honour and memory.

I mentioned earlier that Africa has had an unfair share of violent conflicts and wars, especially when one considers the rampant poverty and low levels of development on the continent. However, I dare say, with a sense of guarded optimism, that we see a glimmer of hope in the evolutions of processes to resolve some of Africa's seemingly intractable conflicts. I have in mind the conflicts in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, the Sudan and Somalia, where encouraging progress has been recorded on the path to finding lasting solutions. The most welcome development in these conflicts, however, is the fact that African nations and leaders have taken the lead in the search for solutions. They have done so under the auspices of the African Union or their regional economic groupings. In several cases, they have also intervened as individuals or as groups of neighbours or like-minded nations and leaders.

Tanzania appreciates the support of the United Nations and the international community for the efforts made by African nations and leaders in the search for peace on the continent. We appeal for continued support to sustain the peace in the reconstruction phase. Equally important, I appeal for timely support and action. Experience has shown that the support of the international community, including the United Nations, in the search for solutions to African conflicts is a bit too slow, or comes a bit too late.

My delegation is extremely pleased to have been a witness, on 25 September, of the adoption of the principles of good-neighbourly relations and cooperation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. It is a welcome initiative. We commend the Secretary-General for conceiving the idea. Once again, I register Tanzania's support for the initiative and promise that we shall do whatever is within our means to promote its success.

I would also like to take this opportunity to call on the international community to extend the necessary political, economic and financial support to the Transitional Government in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, under the leadership of President Joseph Kabila. We consider this critical to keep up the momentum and avoid reversals.

The situation in Burundi, regrettably, remains precarious. While we welcome the smooth transfer of power from President Buyoya to President Ndayizeye, we also take note of positive developments under the Transitional Government. However, the Government and people of Burundi need to be supported to achieve comprehensive peace and social and economic reconstruction. The regional leaders have been trying to help on the peace front and will continue to do so. Some progress has been made, but serious challenges still lie ahead.

The unrelenting support of the international community, especially the Security Council, is therefore essential. We also call on the international community to do more by way of extending economic and financial support to the Transitional Government of Burundi. It needs that support to effectively respond to the humanitarian needs in the country.

My Government welcomes the decision by the United Nations to convene the long awaited international conference on the Great Lakes region. Preparations are progressing well under the able leadership of Mr. Ibrahima Fall, the Secretary-General's special representative for the Great Lakes region. There is good cooperation between him, the African Union and the six core countries of the region. Tanzania feels greatly honoured to be given the opportunity to host the Conference in June 2004. We stand ready to contribute to its success.

The Conference will undoubtedly provide an important forum to all concerned parties to deliberate on important issues of peace, stability and development in the region. We also hope that it will give due focus to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-torn countries. I appeal to all in the United Nations to extend the requisite material, financial, political and diplomatic support to the Conference.

We welcome the latest Baker Plan on resolving the long-standing Western Sahara problem. We appeal to the parties to extend the maximum possible cooperation to Mr. Baker so that the people of Western Sahara can have an opportunity to determine their future peacefully.

Owing to our strategic position in a conflict-ridden region, and our history of stability and traditional hospitality, Tanzania has played host to thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries. The influx began in 1959 and has not stopped to date. At present, we play host to more than 800,000 refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. We remain committed to our international obligations under the 1951 Geneva

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as the cornerstone of international protection. However, our 42 years of experience of hosting refugees have made us see the urgent need to review its relevance and application. We are particularly concerned with the concept and practice of burden-sharing, which does not adequately alleviate the burden of hosting refugees in poor developing countries like ours. We welcome the new concept of "Convention Plus" espoused by the High Commissioner for Refugees. We hope that new and emerging realities will be given serious thought in the discussions and conclusions of the High Commissioner's Executive Committee.

The situation in the Middle East remains a matter of great concern to my Government. When the Middle East road map for peace was promulgated a few months ago, we became hopeful. My Government supported it because it addressed comprehensively the issue of the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, living side by side and in peace with Israel. Despite the current difficulties, we still believe that the road map is the most reasonable and viable way of resolving the long-standing Israel-Palestine conflict. It is imperative, therefore, that the obstacles on the road map be overcome quickly. Violence and counter-violence will not help.

We are also of the view that the use of excessive force and recourse to extrajudicial measures in dealing with Palestinian militants, or exiling President Yasser Arafat, would be counterproductive; it would inflame the situation. We appeal to the Quartet and the Security Council to do everything possible to bring the implementation of the road map back on track.

As we all remember, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the General Assembly at a special session discussed the challenge of poverty and development. At the end we came up with the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, which embodied a vision of engaging in a comprehensive offensive against poverty, deprivation and lack of development. The clear target of halving the scourge of poverty by 2015 was set.

When we look back and evaluate what has been achieved in the three years since the Millennium Summit, we cannot fail to discover that not much has been done. Provision of the estimated $50 billion to $100 billion additional resources required annually over a period of 15 years to finance the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals is far from being realized. The subsequent meetings in Monterrey and Johannesburg, as well as the successive G-8 summits, have been unable to meet the requirement. As it stands now, the Millennium Development Goals risk not being implemented as expected. Indeed, something needs to be done quickly to save that historic summit. It is incumbent upon the developed countries to demonstrate greater political will. Certainly failure will not be good for our Organization and surely it will be bad for all of us.

The current wave of globalization is the greatest economic process of our time. The unfortunate collapse of the World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún last month demands that we face up to this phenomenon. We hope that summit will be reconvened soon. The social imperative of the wave of globalization presents us with two interlinked challenges that are central to the work of this Organization. These pertain, on the one hand, to fighting poverty, and on the other, to working on constructive and inclusive measures to promote the effectiveness of global institutions in global issues and conflicts.

These concerns have also been at the centre of the work of the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization, established last year under the auspices of the International Labour Organization (ILO), with a mandate to promote social justice and decent work, linked to economic and social policies for global prosperity. This World Commission, which my President is privileged to co-chair with President Tarja Halonen of Finland, is about to complete its work and is due to submit its report early next year.

The Commission has been a forum of useful dialogue between eminent personalities with a wide cross-section of backgrounds, views and competencies. It has consulted widely and extensively. Its report is expected to generate practical ideas for change that can make the process of globalization more inclusive and more equitable. It will address the needs of those who feel marginalized, as well as those who have benefited from globalization but feel uncertain about the future. It will speak of the significance of a value-based multilateralism and the role of this Organization.

However, the recommendations, mandate and vision of the work of the Commission will not be

undertaken, pursued and achieved through the work of the ILO alone. They will constitute a wide remit for other agencies of the United Nations, other multilateral agencies, regional groupings, individual Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society. It is also hoped that the report will be submitted to this Assembly for consideration and appropriate promotional direction.

It is the hope of my delegation that the Commission's report will be a welcome basis for collective and concerted action towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and in rendering globalization a process that works for all, in all countries, within countries and between countries.

I would like to associate myself with the statement made this morning by the Permanent Representative of Finland concerning the launching of a Helsinki process on global governance and democracy, with which my Government feels proud to be associated.

The fight against AIDS remains a major challenge to mankind today. It is a war that we must fight and win. We realize the dire consequences of the pandemic on human life and on our economies. The high-level plenary meeting held last week was reassuring and most of us came away from the session modestly optimistic. Certainly, our resolve to squarely face up to the pandemic and to meet the set targets has to be coupled with equal responsibility for leadership initiatives, accountability and more judicious resource mobilization and management.

Mr. Lamba (Malawi), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Reform of the United Nations Security Council has been in the cards for some time now. Tanzania is convinced that the reform of the Security Council is desirable, to make this important organ of our Organization more representative, more democratic, more transparent and more measured in the conduct of its business. We believe that this will go a long way towards renewing the confidence and support of Member States in the relevance and effectiveness of the Organization.

Tanzania accepts the truism that reform is a process and not an event. We support the establishment of the high-level panel of eminent personalities to review the functioning of major organs of the United Nations. We look forward to its early constitution. We attach special importance to this process and promise to play our part.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Laurie Chan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Solomon Islands.

Mr. Chan (Solomon Islands): I present the warm wishes of the Government and people of Solomon Islands on the election of Mr. Julian Hunte as President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I also offer gratitude to his predecessor for presiding over the last session.

And we salute the Secretary-General for his bold leadership of our Organization. Through him, Solomon Islands wishes to pay tribute to the members of the United Nations staff and others who lost their lives during the senseless attack on the United Nations office in Baghdad last August and the recent incident a few days ago.

Fifty-eight years ago, the United Nations was founded to, among others things, guarantee freedom, peace and security and to promote economic and social advancement to all people. Over the years, many threats to international peace and security have receded or been resolved. The cold war has ended. Security and arms control regimes are in place. Institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and others have been established to address the economic and social dimension of humankind's needs.

In spite of these significant achievements, peace, security and our quest for sustained economic and social development remain the main challenges of our time. New and complex threats to international peace and security have emerged at alarming and global scales during the past decades.

International terrorism continues unabated in different parts of the world, targeting and killing mainly innocent and vulnerable civilians. There can be no other option but for the international community to redouble efforts to fight this evil menace on all fronts. Solomon Islands remains committed to its obligations under Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). Steps are being taken to enact relevant legislation and to accede to international conventions to counter terrorist activities.

Solomon Islands believes that a lasting settlement of the crisis in the Middle East will have positive

effects on global peace and security. We therefore support the efforts to bring lasting peace and stability to the region, especially to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Iraq. The United Nations must play a crucial role in the Middle East peace process.

The primary responsibility of addressing the daunting challenges we face today lies with individual countries. However, history proves that much more could be effectively achieved through multilateralism. We all agree that this era of globalization brings new global challenges. And global challenges require cooperative global solutions. The United Nations, as the leading and legitimate multilateral institution, must take equal responsibility in addressing the global challenges we now face and must therefore be strengthened.

This is why Solomon Islands supports the Secretary-General's ongoing reform of the United Nations system as a process, not an event. Yes, the reform process has achieved positive results and greater transparency, but we need to do more if our Organization is to remain effective and relevant to the changing political environment.

A reformed and restructured Security Council is also necessary. Japan, Germany and others deserve permanent membership in the Council. They are equally capable of contributing constructively to achieving and maintaining international peace and security. The use of veto power by the permanent members should be restricted to the provisions of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Restoring law and order, economic recovery and simply bringing normalcy to Solomon Islands have been difficult challenges which my Government faced when we took office in December 2001. But having made the commitment to address these challenges through the Government's strategic plan and priorities, we have engaged ourselves in a series of dialogues and consultations with our development partners. Our intentions are clear — we want outside assistance to restore law and order and economic recovery.

Last July, with unanimous bipartisan support, the Solomon Islands National Parliament adopted enabling legislation that authorized outside assistance to restore law and to help the economy to recover. Following an explicit invitation by the Government, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) led by Australia, was assembled and deployed under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum's Biketawa Declaration and in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter.

I am pleased to inform you that the immediate impacts of RAMSI have been significant and positive. Security in terms of law and order has been re-established and the Government's finances are beginning to stabilize. The course of action through RAMSI is the best option we took. It is a unique regional cooperative and partnership arrangement that is not merely limited to re-establishing and maintaining peace and security. It accords Solomon Islanders the best real opportunity to rebuild the country and address the deep-rooted problems we have had for years, including fighting corruption, restoring the principles of democracy, good governance and respect for fundamental human values and rejuvenating the social cohesiveness of our people.

RAMSI's work ahead will be challenging, but we assure RAMSI of every support and cooperation. The Government and the people of the Solomon Islands are equally committed to achieving this common objective.

We deeply appreciate the overwhelming support of the Pacific Islands Forum countries, expressed through the Forum Declaration on the Solomon Islands, the Forum Foreign Affairs Ministerial Statement and their active contribution as Participating Countries in the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). These countries are committed in their resolve to help a neighbour recover and rebuild. For this, I say "Tagio tumas for helpem fren blong iufala".

We also appreciate the support RAMSI has received from the wider international community, the Commonwealth, the United Nations, the European Union and other individual bilateral donor partners. We look forward to more active support to complement the important work RAMSI is doing in addressing the immediate and long-term objectives and plans.

The Government's National Economic Recovery and Development Plan of 2003 to 2005 will be formally presented to our development partners in November. Our immediate objectives are to restore and maintain law and order, to bring about macroeconomic

Note: Solomon Islands pidgin for: "Thank you for helping your friend".

stability and income growth, to restore full services in health and education and to re-establish the foundation for sustained economic growth and human development.

While the immediate security situation and economic situation of the country are being addressed by RAMSI, the planned November meeting will provide the opportunity for the rest of our development partners to define their respective roles and assistance towards achieving these key objectives.

As a least developed and island State, our economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities are major constraints to achieving sustainable economic growth and livelihoods. But we place our hope on greater international support and partnership to address these constraints in order to meaningfully and successfully implement our national development plans and such key policy outcomes as the 2000 Millennium Development Goals, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and other programmes within the development agenda of the United Nations.

Implementation of the 2000 Millennium Development Goals has been slow. We have, however, now incorporated those objectives into the Government's Economic Recovery and Development Plan of 2003 to 2005, as priorities for national implementation.

The Solomon Islands looks forward to participating fully in the review process of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We envisage the outcome of the 2004 international meeting in Mauritius to be one that will focus on real commitments and practical implementations of the Programme at the national and regional levels.

The Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) provides yet another opportunity and dimension for addressing the pressing problems facing poor countries. Implementation of this Programme at the national level has been slow. Real commitments from the international community to address our constraints, including capacity and indebtedness, have, however, not been forthcoming either.

We commend the work of the High Representative of the Office for the Least Developed Countries in seeking international support and commitment to implement the Programme. We further call on the international community to seriously consider more resolute measures, such as cancellation of debts to highly indebted poor countries.

As a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Solomon Islands is equally concerned that the Cancún meeting failed to yield positive results. Like other least developed countries, we have a key interest in the development dimension of the Doha Round, and we wish to re-echo what we stated in Cancún, namely that a new, equitable and fair trading system must take into account issues such as the difference in income, economic size, technological development and private sector capacities of countries.

The Solomon Islands attaches great importance to regional cooperation. The communiqué of the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum last August, which has been made available as an official document of the fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, reflects the range of issues that directly concern us in the Pacific region. Those issues include climate change and sea-level rise, fisheries and the protection of our marine environment, trade, sustainable development and security-related issues. As small States with inherent geographical and structural disadvantages, our strength lies in pooling our resources to address these issues collectively. We call upon the United Nations to take more active part in regional initiatives.

Allow me at this juncture to express once more our strong support for Taiwan to be admitted as a full member of the United Nations. It is an undeniable fact that under international law, Taiwan is a sovereign state. It has a transparent and democratic political system, a vibrant and progressive economy and a highly efficient social system, all of which are completely independent with no control whatsoever exercised by the People's Republic of China.

Taiwan is a willing partner, able to meet its international obligations under the Charter. Its contribution to the international community and the global economy are well known. Yet only a fortnight ago, this body once again denied the wishes of the people of Taiwan to be considered for membership in the United Nations. Over the years the international community has discriminated against its 23 million people. The delayed World Health Organization

assistance to Taiwan during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome early this year is an example of how reasons of power politics prevail over timely humanitarian assistance.

I have made the assertion that the United Nations must remain relevant to the changing political environment. It must live up to the fundamental values and principles enshrined in its Charter. It must remain a universal and all-inclusive Organization, capable of serving all its Members, however big or small, however powerful or weak and of whatever creed, religion or political belief. Every country must be treated with equal respect and attention. The United Nations must also live up to its principle of equality of all nations in this new millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Natan Teewe, Minister for Communications, Transport and Tourism Development of the Republic of Kiribati.

Mr. Teewe (Kiribati): Allow me at the outset to offer Mr. Julian Hunte my warm congratulations on his election as President. We are confident that he will guide our deliberations during this fifty-eighth session to a productive conclusion. Let me also express my deep appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his effective guidance of the work of the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

Four years ago Kiribati joined the United Nations as one of its youngest Member States. Our membership of the United Nations was an affirmation of our faith in and support for the noble principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Since then, events have occurred to test the resolve of this Organization. Indeed, the United Nations has faced many challenges. The recent brutal and calculated attack on United Nations personnel in Baghdad, which resulted in a tragic loss of life and many injuries, are to be condemned. We mourn the loss of the Secretary-General's senior representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and the others who perished in the attacks.

Kiribati commends the Secretary-General for his unwavering determination to ensure that the United Nations continues to perform the role we expect of it in the international arena.

We have followed with increasing alarm the globalization of terror. No longer can we in the Pacific claim immunity from terrorism. The consequences of terrorist acts are abhorrent. Kiribati condemns terrorism and all acts of terror directed against innocent people. We cannot condone acts of terror, regardless of their purported objective.

Even though we have not been, and may never be, directly subjected to horrors such as that of 11 September 2001 and the terrorist acts in Riyadh, Jakarta and Baghdad, we realize that terrorism knows no boundaries or limitations. It is a crime against humanity and against the international community as a whole, and we must therefore work collectively to defeat it. To do so will require an international response backed by concerted regional and national efforts.

At the international level, Kiribati fully supports the relevant Security Council resolutions against terrorism. The Pacific Islands Forum is actively addressing security issues at the regional level. Despite financial constraints, Kiribati is pleased to have contributed, within the framework of the 2000 Biketawa Declaration, police personnel to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. My Government decided to contribute to that initiative because of our firm belief in the strength of regional cooperation. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands is a clear demonstration of the ability of Pacific Island Forum member countries to respond swiftly and cooperatively to requests from fellow member countries for support in restoring law and order.

While Kiribati appreciates the recognition of this regional initiative by the United Nations, we hope and urge that further assistance will be forthcoming to strengthen and ensure the success of this undertaking.

At the national level, Kiribati has introduced various bills and taken other measures as part of its effort to address security challenges. This is an ongoing process that will progress at a pace dictated by our financial situation, personnel and other constraints. We are confident that, given our commitment, and with appropriate assistance from the international community, we will in time achieve our goals.

Kiribati supports the idea that terrorism must be eliminated. We must all fight against those who reject dialogue as a means of securing their objectives and instead resort to terror. We would like to associate ourselves with the many speakers who advocate that

we exercise restraint. We must ensure that in our fight against terrorism we continue to uphold the principles that are the cornerstones of this esteemed body — the principles that we cherish and in which we firmly believe.

Kiribati fully supports efforts to address the security challenges facing the world today. We are, however, mindful that the magnitude of the security challenges facing Member States differs.

In the case of Kiribati there are many challenges and problems that threaten our people and country. Kiribati is one of the least developed countries and is also a small island developing State located in the middle of the Pacific ocean. Our remoteness and insularity, narrow economic base, small population and high population growth rate are factors that we have to accept.

Being a small island developing States poses many challenges to national efforts in terms of sustainable development and beneficial integration into the world economy. These unique characteristics warrant special consideration for sustained and enhanced cooperation from development partners.

Kiribati has benefited, and continues to benefit, from the various programmes offered through the many United Nations agencies. In acknowledging with gratitude the support extended by the United Nations in this regard, I would also like to record our appreciation to our development partners for their continuing support for our efforts at increasing and enhancing the equitable distribution of development benefits to our peoples.

We realize that a lot more needs to be done. Kiribati has a vast exclusive economic zone rich in fisheries and marine resources. We are actively promoting the sustainable exploitation of these resources, and consider the establishment of an onshore fish processing facility to be an appropriate development.

Kiribati comprises low-lying coral atolls and is therefore very vulnerable to climate change, climate variability and sea-level rise. This is an issue of high priority for us, as it is for other low-lying countries. It is also an issue that requires an international response. Political commitment and a high level of cooperation by the international community are called for in addressing this challenge.

There is a need for immediate reductions in and limits on greenhouse gas emissions to bring them into line with the objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We call upon the major emitters of greenhouse gases to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in a timely manner.

We recognize the need to develop and implement appropriate adaptation response measures, and call for support in this respect from international sources, including the Global Environment Facility.

International support will similarly be required in the joint implementation of the vulnerability and adaptation Pacific type 2 initiatives, launched last year at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

We look forward to the 2004 international meeting to be held in Mauritius. This will provide a valuable opportunity to the international community to take stock of what has happened since Rio and Barbados. We certainly hope that Mauritius will provide a road map of concrete and practical actions, which are required to achieve the objectives of the Programme of Action. While we accept primary responsibility for our own development, we also realize that the achievement of such aspirations will be beyond our reach if we have to work alone. We require the assistance of our partners in development.

These have been turbulent times for the United Nations. Recent events have brought to the fore the need for the United Nations to adapt. The rapidly changing global environment in which the United Nations operates demands adaptations if the Organization is to continue to be of relevance to Member States.

Kiribati joins previous speakers in welcoming the reform initiatives outlined by the Secretary-General. We realize that Member States must direct and actively support the adaptation process. The direction and support thus accorded to the United Nations will enable it to become more responsive to the aspirations of its Member States and those of the communities and peoples they represent.

Kiribati fully supports the view that the United Nations and its major organs should be more representative and more democratic in order to reflect the expanded membership of the Organization. The rules so appropriate to situations in the 1940s cannot be

applied practically and effectively in the twenty-first century.

To conclude, we are faced with new challenges. We must commit ourselves to tackling these emerging challenges meaningfully. We must therefore be ready to introduce and accept changes appropriate to our times.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Jean-Marc Hoscheit, Chairman of the delegation of Luxembourg.

Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Ms. Lydie Polfer, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, regrets that she is not able to speak to the Assembly today and has asked me to do so in her place.

The current President of the European Union, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, has already presented to the Assembly the priorities and positions of the European Union, which Luxembourg supports with conviction.

The United Nations remains in mourning following the cowardly and inhuman attack of 19 August 2003 against United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, which took the lives of 22 persons — most of whom were United Nations personnel — including that of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Today our thoughts are with those victims, who, day after day, through their work in the service of the Organization, helped to make the world a better place.

As was recently noted by the Secretary-General, that heinous act raises important questions, because it is

> "a direct challenge to the vision of world solidarity and of collective security rooted in the Charter and articulated in the Millennium Declaration". *(A/58/323, chapter I, para. 2)*

It is our responsibility, as representatives of the nations of the world, gathered here at the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, to meet this challenge and to try to provide constructive answers that open prospects for the future.

A few months ago, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Lydie Polfer, presented to the Luxembourg Parliament her foreign policy declaration in a context characterized by the deep divisions in the international community that marked the international situation at the beginning of this year. At that time, Ms. Polfer elaborated on these thoughts, which also define the overall approach of the Luxembourg Government to multilateral cooperation.

> "During the debates on Iraq, all sides extensively debated the role and the credibility of our shared institutions. Have they shown their limits? Have they ceased to function? Are they still adapted to our day and age? Is multilateralism still relevant today? I would like to give a clear answer to this question. Yes, more than ever, we need multilateral bodies that allow us to work together so that international law can be established and respected, with international rules and procedures that ensure respect for human rights and that govern the lives of all States, regardless of their size. This is not just wishful thinking, but something that is in our interest.
>
> "We must not only assist in the development of these institutions, but also participate actively in strengthening them through committed and constructive cooperation. The United Nations is, of course, the primary forum for such cooperation to take place".

But while we believe that multilateral cooperation remains the best way of dealing with the many current international issues, we must, however, reflect on ways and means of adapting such cooperation to the evolution of our world, with a view to defining a new multilateralism for the twenty-first century and to rethinking the conditions of a new kind of global governance. In this context, the Millennium Declaration charts a steady course that will enable us to mobilize the international community to take action on a number of specific, quantifiable objectives.

Among recent advances, I would like to highlight in particular the achievements registered at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly under the leadership of President Kavan; we commend the innovative work he did during his presidency of the General Assembly. We wish also to stress the process of reflection that was inspired by the Brahimi report on peacekeeping operations.

Much work remains to be done, however. The two recent reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and on the strengthening of the United Nations provide them with both an analytical

framework and an operational plan of action of vital importance. We must provide them with concrete follow-up.

The United Nations must remain the premier institution for meeting the challenges facing humankind and for finding shared solutions. To quote the expressive words of Kofi Annan,

> "The challenge ahead is to strengthen our capacity for collective action and thus forge a common destiny in a time of accelerating global change". *(A/57/387, chapter I, para. 2)*

We must reaffirm the status of international law while developing it to take account of new situations and contexts. We are doing this successfully in the fields of the protection of human rights, the fight against terrorism, the environment, and in other fields. The inception of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a major stage, which we welcome. We hope that it will soon begin work on the full range of its activities, in accordance with the terms of its Statute.

We appeal to all Members of our Organization to accede to the Rome Statute in order to give the ICC the universality that will enable it to fight impunity for the gravest of crimes. We must continue, with determination and courage, efforts to reform and revitalize our institutions. Much has already been done, thanks in particular to the efforts of our Secretary-General regarding the Secretariat, whose structures have been modernized and whose procedures have been rationalized, though work must continue, particularly in the financial, budgetary and management areas.

Last week, the Secretary-General rightly drew our attention to the vital renewal of the intergovernmental bodies of our Organization — be it the Security Council, the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council. With respect to the General Assembly in particular, our President — whom I wish warmly to congratulate on his election to his important post — undertook a certain number of initiatives aimed at revitalizing our annual session, in order to give it once again the central place it should occupy as the primary venue for meetings, debates and stock-taking. I wish to assure the President that Luxembourg — which holds a vice-presidency of the General Assembly — will fully support his endeavours.

The ability to work with updated methods on a streamlined agenda that focuses on the real needs of our day seems to us to be a prerequisite for the increased presence and greater relevance of the General Assembly in international debates.

Important progress has already been made in the areas of peacekeeping and peace-building. The presentation in 2000 of the Brahimi report launched an intensive process of reflection and debate, and led to a number of crucial decisions aimed at more effective management of peacekeeping operations. The adoption of Security Council resolution 1327 (2000) and the Assembly's adoption on 3 July 2003 of resolution 57/337, "Prevention of armed conflict", constituted particularly significant events, which we welcome, just as we support their practical implementation.

While the debate has developed considerably, politically and conceptually, we must emphasize the admirable work carried out by the United Nations in the field, in often difficult conditions. It should be recalled that today our Organization is managing 15 peacekeeping operations throughout the world, mobilizing approximately 40,000 Blue Helmets and civilian staff. We can rightly be proud of this, without being complacent. The missions in Timor-Leste, Kosovo and Sierra Leone have shown the decisive impact that the United Nations can have when it has a clear mandate and adequate resources.

Here again, much remains to be done. The difficult situations that persist in countries such as Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and in the Great Lakes region, not to mention the "forgotten conflicts", continue to demand greater attention by the international community. By contributing to the shared effort, particularly in Kosovo and Afghanistan, Luxembourg has shown its readiness to assume its share of responsibility in this regard.

Special attention should be given in the future to the problem of the transition from intervention in emergencies and crisis situations to the handling of post-conflict contexts. Integrating all dimensions, particularly the political, humanitarian, security and economic, in a single approach, perfecting the instruments and methodologies adapted to this type of challenge, seems to us to be an urgent and necessary task.

The Government of Luxembourg is convinced that the noble task of preserving peace must be based

on a broad and complex concept of security. New threats have been added to the dangers of traditional military confrontation. At the forefront of those threats are terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Two years after the deadly attacks of 11 September, which touched the entire world, we can see that great progress has been made in the fight against terrorism. A firm position of principle and a multidisciplinary approach remain indispensable in order to combat and stop this widespread and destructive phenomenon. Luxembourg will play its full part in this effort, which must be pursued tirelessly, with our Organization playing a major role.

The danger of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continues to arouse the legitimate concern of our peoples. World leaders have a responsibility to confront this serious threat to peace and security by establishing and strengthening the necessary international regimes. For its part, the European Union has decided, on the basis of the European Council's Thessaloniki Declaration, to develop a long-term strategy against proliferation, and has already adopted basic principles and a concrete plan of action to give shape to this strategy.

Likewise, international arms limitation and reduction efforts, particularly with regard to small arms, must be continued and broadened.

But, given the immediate and tragic urgency of violent conflicts and terrorist attacks, we must not lose sight of a more structural cause of global instability and insecurity: the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment. In a world in which every year almost 15 million children under the age of 5 die of the effects of poverty, we must continue unabated our fight for development. The Millennium Declaration, the conclusions of the Johannesburg Summit and the Monterrey Consensus have shown us the way and the objectives to be achieved in order to establish a real global partnership for development.

The dimensions of this basic problem are many and interdependent. I shall cite just three.

The first dimension is the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, in which Luxembourg is strongly involved and which was quite rightly the focus of attention at the high-level debate that opened this session of the General Assembly. The second is international trade. The failure of the Fifth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Cancún is undeniably a major disappointment. If we want to achieve a balanced and more just trade system, it is imperative that we resume the dialogue on the objectives to be achieved and the way to achieve them. The third dimension is financing for development, which, according to the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit, remains "well below the level needed to meet the Goals" (A/58/323, para. 49), even though we are pleased at a recent rise in the volume of official development assistance. For its part, my country is participating in this global solidarity effort by devoting over 0.8 per cent of its gross national product to official development assistance, with a view to achieving the target of 1 per cent about midway through the decade.

While development remains the new name of peace, we must not lose sight of other factors of instability, such as ecological problems, new infectious diseases, transnational crime and corruption, and, lastly, grave and repeated violations of human rights and threats to democracy and good governance.

Let us not forget, in that regard, the wise words of Mr. Annan, who has written:

> "Greater respect for human rights, along with democracy and social justice, will, in the long term, be the most effective prophylactic against terror". (*ibid, para. 76*)

Given these multiple threats, defining a programme of shared security on a global scale, within multilateral bodies, is a primary objective. The European Union, an international actor deeply involved in a vast process of enlargement and constitutional development, has begun the discussion of a strategic concept of security and defence, which will make a major contribution to the international debate in this regard.

For more than a year, international attention has been focused once again on the situation in Iraq. There is no need to go over again before this audience the sequence of events that led last spring to the onset of war in that afflicted part of the world. We all remember the deep divisions that emerged in the international community during that period, threatening to upset the very foundations of our Organization. Regardless of the stand that we may have taken individually regarding

these events, we must now look to the future to determine the prospects of a better future for the Iraqi people. That is the objective that should bring us together now.

We are convinced that the United Nations must play a central role here, on the basis of a clear and substantial mandate accompanied by adequate resources. While it is primarily up to the Iraqi people to decide their own future, we all agree that sovereignty should be transferred to the Iraqis themselves as soon as possible.

In the phase of political, socio-economic and diplomatic transition and reconstruction, there must quickly begin a steady transfer of authority and responsibility to legitimate institutions recognized by the Iraqi people. That process must include the drafting and adoption of a new constitution, and the holding, as soon as the situation allows, of free, democratic elections. Among the essentials for this are the restoration of basic living conditions and security in the daily lives of Iraqis, reconstruction of the basic infrastructure and a rapid relaunching of economic activity.

The Security Council and its members bear the primary responsibility, but the emergence of an independent, democratic, prosperous and peaceful Iraq is in the common interest of all Members of our Organization. Together with its European Union partners, the Government of Luxembourg remains confident that through a broad mobilization the international community will be able to make a decisive contribution to this objective.

Year after year, the General Assembly must address the situation in the Middle East, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because progress towards a just and lasting peace remains difficult. Even faced with a resumption of tension and repeated acts of violence and terrorism, which we emphatically reject, we have a duty and responsibility to persevere in the search for solutions that will enable reconciliation among the States and peoples of the region. The search for peace must be tireless. The European Union remains prepared and determined to play its role, especially through its action in the Quartet. We remain convinced that the course charted by the road map remains the right way to break the current impasse. But all players who are directly involved must display good will and good faith in re-launching the peace process by creating the indispensable conditions of confidence and security. That is the urgent appeal that we make to them, that is the urgent task that we must undertake.

In the face of wars and violent conflict, in the face of new threats, in the face of violations of human rights, in the face of poverty and underdevelopment, the law and multilateralism are an often fragile but irreplaceable recourse for nations. While we must try vigorously to remedy the weaknesses and insufficiencies in multilateral cooperation, it remains a source of hope for the men and women of the entire world. This is a hope that we must not betray, this is the primary responsibility that is ours at this fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. However, one representative has requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind Members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to ten minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): The Eritrean delegation is taking the floor to exercise its right of reply to the statement made by the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia relative to the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace process, in the interest of truth and to set the record straight.

It is true that the two countries signed the Algiers Agreements in 2000. The Algiers Agreements created, inter alia, a Boundary Commission, which was empowered to render a final and binding decision. The United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the European Union (EU) became guarantors of the Agreements. The Ethiopian Government was fully aware of the content and meaning of the Agreements. It is therefore not possible to talk about the Algiers Agreements without mentioning, as the Foreign Minister did, the central institution created by the Agreements, namely the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission.

The Boundary Commission rendered its decision on 13 April 2002. The decision was endorsed by the Security Council and all the guarantors. The Government of Ethiopia also fully accepted the decision and agreed to implement it without any reservations. It also lavished praise on the Commission and its members. Thus, the Foreign Minister had declared that:

"Sanity has won over insanity and the rule of law has prevailed over the law of the jungle. Ethiopia is fully satisfied with the decision of the Independent Boundary Commission. According to the Algiers peace deal, both parties should accept the decision of the Boundary Commission as final and binding with no right to appeal".

The Ethiopian Council of Ministers declared:

"Accordingly, pursuant to the Algiers Agreement, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Government accepts and is ready to implement the legal decision of the Commission. The Government of Ethiopia would like to take this opportunity to extend its regards to the Boundary Commission for discharging its duties with a sense of responsibility and great care. The Government of Ethiopia would also like to express its strong interest in the speedy demarcation of the boundary. In this respect, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Government would like to emphasize that the Eritrean Government should honour its obligations to cooperate in the demarcation process".

By April 2003, the Ethiopian Government started to have reservations and threatened to reject the peace process after the Commission recognized Badme's status — which was the causus belli and consequently was pregnant with legal and political implications, particularly on the issue of who was the aggressor and who the victim of aggression — as sovereign Eritrean territory.

On 19 September 2003, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, wrote a letter to Secretary-General Kofi Annan denouncing the decision as "illegal, unjust and irresponsible" and rejecting the demarcation process. This is what is critically absent from the statement of the Foreign Minister. The truth — the bitter truth — is that Ethiopia has, by rejecting the decisions of the Boundary Commission, effectively killed the Algiers Agreements.

Ethiopia's rulers have in fact made it clear that they do not regard themselves as bound by international norms and decisions, that they have contempt for the rule of law and have decided to make their own determination on matters submitted for arbitration and to then impose it on the Security Council. They are threatening to unleash another round of war if the decision of the arbitration commission is not illegally reversed by the Security Council.

Yet they call themselves law-abiding, peace-loving victims of aggression. Is it possible for a country to commit aggression against itself? After the definitive location of Badme in Eritrea, does it need much imagination as to who has committed aggression or who is the victim of aggression? Must aggression be rewarded by the reversal of a final and binding decision?

Ethiopia's deliberate lack of respect for — and the rejection of — the unanimous, final and binding decision of the Commission, the decisions of the Security Council and the hallowed principles enshrined in the Charter is a threat to the intricate web of *corpus juris* and institutions forged by the international community during the past six decades. Those who weaken the United Nations and its values, principles and norms by rejecting the rules of the game, including the rule of law, must shoulder the appalling responsibility of returning the world to the law of the jungle, war and pestilence, and so must those who appease them.

To this end, the Security Council, which is charged with the primary responsibility of the maintenance of international peace and security, must take the necessary measures to ensure that a State that has solemnly signed an inviolate agreement, under the auspices of the United Nations, fulfils its obligations without any reservations. The United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, must live up to its role as the guardian of the rule of law. It must not delegate that mandate to any institution, whether international or regional, if it is to preserve the integrity of the peace process.

In spite of the past, the people and Government of Eritrea believe in the United Nations and repose trust in it. We continue to have faith in the Security Council and the other guarantors and believe that they will act, without fear or favour, on the basis of what is right and out of respect for, and the preservation of, the integrity of the decisions of the Boundary Commission. They must reaffirm the need to comply with agreements that have been solemnly signed and reject any attempt to abandon them. In so doing, of course, they strengthen the foundation and bolster the effectiveness of the judicial system of the international community.

Mr. Kidane (Ethiopia): Ethiopia does not like to waste the time of this body in engaging in allegations and counter-allegations, but we would like to set the record straight.

Peace-loving Eritrea has committed aggression against almost all its neighbours in its ten years of existence. Ethiopia, on the other hand, in its thousand years of existence as a nation, has never committed aggression against any nation in the world. Ethiopia has a very clear record.

It was in 1998 that Eritrea committed aggression against Ethiopia. The place mentioned earlier by the representative of Eritrea — Badme — happens to be the causus belli. The African Union (AU) deployed its ambassadors to find the truth as to who had administered that area before 1998. The ambassadors' committee returned to the AU with a report of their findings. The report was endorsed by the Council of Ministers and by the heads of State and Government of the AU. It is a glaring fact that Badme was being administered by Ethiopia before 1998 and that it has never been under Eritrean administration — not even for a single day. So that settles the issue: Eritrea was the aggressor, and Ethiopia was the victim of aggression.

After the aggression had been committed, Ethiopia literally begged Eritrea to leave Ethiopian land. Eritrea refused to comply until it was pushed out by Ethiopian forces. After pushing out Eritrean forces in self-defence, Ethiopia went deep into Eritrean territory in the process of its counteroffensive. It was obvious to everyone that the Eritrean army was in total disarray. But the Ethiopian Government — a peace-loving Government — decided to stop the war unilaterally, and our Prime Minister declared unilaterally that the war was over because the aggression had been reversed. That was what happened.

It was because of Ethiopia that the Algiers Agreement became a reality. There were brokers of that peace agreement: the United Nations, the Government of the United States and the European Union were in Algiers as well and were witness to the Agreement. So it was Ethiopia, with the assistance of those international partners, that made the Algiers Agreement a reality. If Ethiopia had not been in favour of peace, there would have been no reason for Ethiopia to stop the war and to declare it ended. Ethiopia could have pushed into any area; Eritrea was not in a position to defend itself.

After the Algiers Agreement had come into being, Ethiopia cooperated with the Boundary Commission, as the representative of Eritrea rightly put it. Ethiopia accepted the delimitation decision. We still stand by our commitment, and we still accept the Boundary Commission's delimitation decision. The problem arose when the Boundary Commission failed to live up to its words — that is, its words in the delimitation decision. Since the Commissioners had never been to Ethiopia or to Eritrea, and since the Commission had never carried out a field investigation, the Commission promised that there would be such an investigation before demarcation was completed. If any anomalies were found in the process of investigation, such anomalies were to be corrected. Ethiopia requested the Commission to correct any such anomalies. The Commission suggested that there were anomalies, but that they could be corrected only if Ethiopia and Eritrea came together and provided the Commission with an additional mandate.

Ethiopia and Eritrea are not on speaking terms and were not on speaking terms; therefore, there was no way for us to provide the Commission with an additional mandate. So Ethiopia suggested to the Commission that it needed no additional mandate to correct its own mistakes. The Commission then suggested that there should be dialogue between the parties. The Secretary-General and the Security Council also suggested to the parties that there should be dialogue with a view to making the peace process successful, but Eritrea remains adamant that there will be no dialogue. There is no additional mandate for the Boundary Commission; the Commission's delimitation decision must be applied mechanically.

As it stands, the Boundary Commission's decision — which the Boundary Commission itself admitted contains anomalies — divides not only villages, but homesteads. The Commission based its decision on the conduct of the parties, and it is very difficult to imagine a single homestead being administered by two nations; that is simply impossible. So, as I said earlier, the Commission itself recognized that there were anomalies but suggested that, in order to correct them, we come together and provide it with an additional mandate, and Eritrea refused. The Secretary-General and the Security Council suggested that we talk, and Eritrea refused. So there it is.

We should like to suggest to the Security Council that the demarcation process should continue in the areas where there is agreement and that it continue to seek the facilitation of partners with a view to resolving the remaining problems. I should like to reiterate my Government's position that we remain committed to the Algiers Agreement and to the Boundary Commission's delimitation decision. We are still prepared to have the boundary demarcated, but we seek the assistance of the international community in resolving the remaining issues. I would challenge Eritrea to join us in that peaceful exercise.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): I just heard a series of half-truths and non-truths from the representative of Ethiopia, and therefore I must at least refer to two or three of the issues he raised.

The first issue is the question of dialogue. The representative of Ethiopia said that the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the rest of the international community have asked both parties to engage in dialogue on demarcation issues. That is incredible, because it is a blatant misrepresentation of the United Nations position on the matter. Nothing in the Secretary-General's various reports, in the Boundary Commission's recommendations or in the Security Council's decisions even remotely suggests dialogue on demarcation. On the contrary, they urge prompt and full demarcation.

For example, paragraph 31 of the Secretary-General's report of 23 June 2003 (S/2003/665) — we had hoped that the Ethiopian representative would cite paragraphs, dates and reference numbers when he made wild allegations — emphatically declares that "expeditious demarcation of the border is crucial" and urges the two parties to cooperate with the Commission "so that these activities can be undertaken without delay". In his report of 4 September (S/2003/858), the Secretary-General declares, in paragraph 32:

> "In the same voluntary manner as the two parties created the Boundary Commission and selected its members, they must now accept its decisions and assist it in the expeditious demarcation of the border".

His report of 6 March 2003 (S/2003/257) indicates in paragraph 13 that

> "the United Nations would be prepared, without compromising the Boundary Commission's decisions, to facilitate the resolution of problems that may arise as a result of the transfer of territorial control, as provided in article 4.16 of the Algiers Agreement".

How, then, could Eritrea have rejected a proposal that was never made?

I have Security Council resolution 1507 (2003) of 12 September. I quote paragraph 6, in which the Council:

> "*Reaffirms* the crucial importance of political dialogue between the two countries for the success of the peace process and the consolidation of progress made so far, *welcomes* initiatives to facilitate this dialogue, and *calls again on* both parties to normalize their relationship through political dialogue".

So, political dialogue refers first to the consolidation of the gains and, secondly, normalization of relations. It never, ever, mentioned dialogue on demarcation.

History will tell the truth about who had and had not won the war. But a court of law decides where a place is and a place is not. It is not for me to say Badme is Eritrean. It is not for the Ethiopians to say Badme is Ethiopian. We had an Arbitration Commission, and the Arbitration Commission emphatically and unequivocally said that Badme is part of Eritrea. There is total clarification on this matter. Clarification was given. Badme was part of Eritrea, and whether the Ethiopian representative likes it or not, Badme is and will be part of Eritrea. Whosoever attacked Badme is ...

The President: I am sorry that I have to interrupt the speaker, but the five-minute period is up.

Mr. Kidane (Ethiopia): We have come to discover that the word "dialogue" has become malignant. It is considered a vice by our friends in the north. We have no aversion to dialogue. Eritrea has. That is very unfortunate. We are sacrificing the livelihood of our people. We are condemning our people to poverty, because we cannot make peace between ourselves. I suggest that we should come back to our senses and start thinking about our poor people, at least for a single day.

Just to set the record straight, I would like to refer this august body to Security Council resolution 1507 (2003) of 12 September, in which the Council

suggested that there should be dialogue between the parties with a view to realizing a lasting and durable peace.

The Algiers Agreement is about lasting and durable peace. It is not a mechanical drawing of a temporary line that will end up being a recipe for another round of conflict. That what the Algiers Agreement is and that was what the Security Council outlined in its resolutions. That is a fact. We have a series of resolutions in which the Security Council suggested that there is a need for dialogue. There are also letters addressed to the Ethiopian Government by the United Nations on different occasions, and they all allude to the need for dialogue between the parties with a view to sorting out the difficulties that we are encountering in the process of demarcating boundaries.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.

United Nations A/58/PV.21

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

21st plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Akayev (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly and to wish great success to the work of the fifty-eighth session under your wise guidance. I also take this opportunity to extend deep appreciation to Mr. Jan Kavan for his insightful leadership of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

This is my second successive participation in the work of the General Assembly. In my statement last year, I supported the resolute actions of the anti-terrorist coalition in eliminating the Central Asian centre of international terrorism in Afghanistan, as well as the other measures taken by the world community to address global challenges to international peace and security.

As life has demonstrated, the United Nations plays a highly positive role in organizing the common struggle against international terrorism. In this regard, the idea of giving the United Nations the lead role in guiding the global anti-terrorist coalition deserves genuine support. One of the primary objectives of my statement last year was to appeal to the United Nations to recognize, as a great event in the history of my country, the two thousand, two hundredth anniversary of Kyrgyz Statehood, as an event of international status.

The resolution of the General Assembly on Kyrgyz Statehood was a powerful force in raising the national spirit of our people. For that, we are sincerely grateful to our Organization. Indeed, whenever any problems emerge at a global level, we turn to the United Nations and unfailingly get support.

Recently, there have been heated discussions concerning the role of the United Nations. Some hotheads even allege that the United Nations has exhausted its potential. I believe that such ideas contradict the interests of the world community, although on the whole, I see nothing wrong with debates on this theme. Such discussions are demonstrations of democracy, to the development of which the United Nations has significantly contributed worldwide.

The development of democracy at a national level involves differences of opinion and criticism of the authorities. Something similar takes place in the framework of the world community. Here, too, a

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polarization of opinions is occurring, but in this case it is our common offspring — the United Nations — that is coming under attack. Attempts to jeopardize its role are perceived, especially by small countries, as undermining that international body which embodies the interests of all mankind. There is a wise saying: "Small countries must have big friends". The United Nations is just such a big reliable friend.

However, it is difficult to deny that the work of the United Nations is not yet ideal. Certainly its efficiency needs to be enhanced. We understand the Secretary-General's concern for the situation of the United Nations, and we fully share his assessment of the current world situation.

In this regard, the attention paid to the work of this current session of the General Assembly by many heads of State is impressive. The statements made by Mr. George Bush, the President of the United States; Mr. Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation; Mr. Jacques Chirac, the President of France; Mr. Gerhard Schroeder, Chancellor of Germany, as well as other heads of State, despite certain differences in approach, clearly have shown the desire to have a definite role for the United Nations in building the new world order, one that is better in keeping with the aspirations of all people on Earth.

The most efficient way of overcoming disagreements in political practice is to search for compromise. We are pleased to note that the technique of compromise is playing a positive role in resolving disagreements on such a key issue for the world as the settlement of the problem of Iraq. This is an encouraging sign.

We would like to stress, again, that any measures to improve the United Nations should be based solely on the idea of improving the work of the Organization. The Kyrgyz Republic is ready to support reasonable proposals on this subject, including measures to increase the efficiency of the work of the Security Council.

I believe that alongside the search for ways to improve the United Nations, we should concentrate on those specific problems which will need to be resolved again in the foreseeable future. In this regard, we may look at the results of the Millennium Summit, to those vital problems that were highlighted at that time in the discerning report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan entitled, "We the Peoples" (A/54/2000), and also contained in the Millennium Declaration. These last three years have highlighted even more the importance of the issues raised at that time.

Since then, the fight against international terrorism was added as one of the major challenges to international peace and security. The report of Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan to the present session of the General Assembly focuses the attention of Member States on the need to increase their efforts towards implementing the Millennium Declaration. This approach deserves very broad support.

I believe that only such a universal, global organization as the United Nations is able to cope with the challenges faced by the world community. But the United Nations needs help, and we, through our joint efforts, particularly with the support of the big Powers, can accomplish this. If we do not, then we would be acting at cross-purposes and could expect a grim result.

Besides common problems shared by the world community, each country has its own specific problems. Kyrgyzstan is determined to resolve its own problems through reliance on its own efforts. Addressing this Assembly, I cannot fail to stress the concentration of our efforts on advancing the democratic process. In particular, last year I put forward a national idea entitled, "Kyrgyzstan — a country of human rights". For the development of this idea, a Democratic Code was elaborated and a Public Council of Democratic Security was established. Following the outcome of a national referendum, a new Constitution was adopted which more fully reflects the level of democracy attained as well as new challenges to its development. These measures have given a powerful stimulus to the progressive movement of our country towards a democratic system.

We also attach great importance to the establishment of fair, open and responsible governance and to enhancing the effectiveness of the anti-corruption policy being pursued. This year I established the National Council on Conscientious Governance to strengthen the work being conducted in Kyrgyzstan to create an anti-corruption atmosphere in our society.

We are focusing our main efforts on the fight against poverty, but the Republic cannot resolve this problem without external assistance. We highly commend the role played by the United Nations in the

fight against poverty, and the measures undertaken by our Organization. Again, we appeal to the world community and to the developed countries not to reduce their efforts in providing assistance to the developing countries for the purpose of overcoming poverty.

In the autumn of 2002, under the aegis of the United Nations, the Global Mountain Summit was held in our capital, Bishkek. The Bishkek Global Mountain Platform adopted at the Summit has, in essence, become the outcome document of the International Year of Mountains, observed by the United Nations. The document has defined key tasks for sustainable development of the mountain regions of our planet. To address them, Switzerland has initiated creation of the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions. This is only the beginning; we have just set in place the first building blocks for the foundation of an institutionalized home for the mountain regions.

Kyrgyzstan hopes to receive assistance from the United Nations and its family of organizations towards the establishment of an international information and educational centre for mountain States, as well as for a network for developing mountain States, with its secretariat established in Bishkek. I believe that the Kyrgyz Republic is the best possible location for this centre since most of our country is mountainous.

The United Nations faces an abundance of problems. One of the most important challenges is the fight against international terrorism. Other global challenges include political and religious extremism, territorial separatism, drug trafficking and the fight against fatal illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and others.

It is becoming increasingly urgent to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The Kyrgyz Republic supports taking decisive measures in this respect. We believe, however, that force should be used only on the basis of Security Council decisions and in accordance with international law so as to prevent conflict and discord within the international community.

Not only must global measures be taken in this respect, but efforts must be made at the regional and national levels. One good example of such efforts is the work done by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with the lead role being played by Russia and China, actively relying on the Central Asian participants.

In conclusion, I should like once again to stress not only my full confidence in the United Nations, but also the determination of the Kyrgyz Republic resolutely to strive, together with our partners in the international community, for the preservation and strengthening of this Organization, which we believe most fully reflects our interests. May the Almighty help us in this work, and let all good peoples of the world join in our prayers for the success and prosperity of the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Kyrgyz Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Elvin Nimrod, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Grenada.

Mr. Nimrod (Grenada): It is with a deep sense of pride and pleasure that my delegation congratulates you, Sir, on your unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. You have done the entire Caribbean region proud. Your own country, Saint Lucia, one of the smallest States Members of this Organization, can feel especially proud. We are confident that, given the combination of your vast experience, solid leadership skills and charismatic personality, this session will go down in history as one of the most dynamic and constructive for all States, large and small.

My delegation pays tribute to your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his enlightened and innovative conduct of this body during the previous session.

My delegation also expresses profound sympathy to the Government and the people of Saint Lucia on the recent passing of your predecessor, Sir, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Honourable George Odlum.

Each succeeding President of the General Assembly inherits an agenda of recurring resolutions and outcome documents adopted at the many international summit-level conferences during the past

decade. My delegation remains confident that your administration, Sir, will put implementation concerns high on the development agenda.

When the United Nations was founded 58 years ago, the focus was basically on world peace and security in the aftermath of the devastating effects of the Second World War. Security concerns have once again taken centre stage in current international affairs, but they should not displace the consideration of important issues on the economic and social agenda.

My Government remains totally committed to the global fight against terrorism and the perpetrators of violence. In this regard, it will certainly take all necessary actions to ensure that Grenada is an active partner in this common struggle.

The proliferation of transnational criminal activities is the most vivid example of the negative effect of open borders in a globalized world. The illicit trade in weapons and drugs, money-laundering and trafficking in women and children clearly need to be tackled in a more organized manner. A truly effective global response to these and other threats requires that all States act in concert with each other. In this regard, my Government, despite its limited resources, is fulfilling its commitment.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, Grenada has ratified or acceded to all relevant international treaties and conventions on terrorism and related activities. All the appropriate domestic legislation has been enacted.

My delegation is convinced that the elimination of terrorism alone will not guarantee social and economic stability. It will not solve the many problems associated with underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, and unemployment — all of which give rise to hopelessness and pose a threat to peace and security.

The holding of the recent meeting here at the United Nations to assess the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS made clear that the pandemic is continuing to take a heavy toll, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.

As the many leaders who took part in the debate said, much remains to be done in the fight against this dreadful scourge if the Declaration of Commitment target is to be met by 2005. Thus, certain critical areas in this fight, such as education on prevention and care targeted especially to young people, mobilization of resources by engaging civil society including the business sector, and access to affordable medicine are absolutely essential.

Fighting HIV/AIDS is both a medical and a socio-economic problem, with far-reaching implications for small developing countries such as my own. Caring for the ever-increasing numbers with the virus, together with educating and sensitizing the general public on prevention issues and responsible behaviour, has become burdensome, in terms of both human and financial resources. Partnership and support from the developed countries will be welcomed.

My delegation is convinced that the eradication of poverty and its related ills is central to social and economic stability. Poverty will not simply disappear through passionate pleas and eloquent statements, but through genuine collaborative and cooperative efforts. My Government is acutely aware of our responsibility, as a sovereign and independent nation to provide for our citizens.

The efforts of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to establish a single market and economy with a view to harnessing and efficiently utilizing the limited resources of the region, improving competitiveness, productivity and general cooperation, must be applauded.

The more developed countries must speedily come to the rescue of the needy developing countries by providing tangible and meaningful technical, economic and other forms of assistance — assistance that will have a positive impact on the lives of millions in the developing world.

It is for this reason that we will continue to clamour for reforms within the global trading system, and especially within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), particularly as it relates to trade in agriculture and in other services.

My delegation calls for a substantial reduction of the subsidies afforded to farmers in the more developed and industrialized economies, and also for the removal of non-tariff and other technical barriers to the export of our commodities.

In our efforts to diversify our economies and to enhance our revenue-earning options, we need the flexibility to develop our service sector free from pressures and conditionalities, to add value to our

primary products, and to be able to export our exotic fruits and vegetables.

Our small and vulnerable economies can become viable if the right conditions are created to facilitate the trade of our products on the world market.

The failure of the recently concluded WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancún, Mexico, to reach a compromise on issues of extreme importance is a cause for concern. The outcome has confirmed, in unequivocal terms, that the divide between rich and poor nations continues to widen.

My country endorses the idea that the United Nations must continue its work to ensure that democracy and respect for basic human rights prevail in all civil societies. However, this body should, as a matter of principle, also seek to ensure that fair, just and morally correct actions and decisions are taken on equally important matters.

The people of the Republic of Cuba continue to live under a unilaterally imposed financial, commercial and economic blockade, as they have for more than 40 years. This has resulted in great human and material losses, and in many personal traumatic experiences. Grenada joins the overwhelming majority in the United Nations and calls for the unconditional lifting of those sanctions.

We believe that universally accepted norms and values and economic growth and prosperity can flourish only under normal circumstances. The people of Cuba need that chance.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to escalate, and every effort must be made to return to the road map, as it remains the best hope for the resolution of the problem.

Similarly, my delegation is concerned about the negative effect of civil unrest and tensions around the globe, particularly in Iraq, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Government supports all efforts, actions and initiatives to ensure that normalcy returns to the countries and regions concerned. We urge patience, understanding and tolerance in dealing with these difficult situations.

The United Nations has been seized with the reform of the Security Council and with the revitalization of the General Assembly for a number of years. When the United Nations was founded 58 years ago, the membership was 51; today there are 191 Member States.

Much has changed in the geopolitical dynamics of the world, which the United Nations represents and reflects. Therefore, there is a need for structural and functional changes in the Security Council and the General Assembly, two of the main organs of greatest importance in the world body.

At the beginning of this intervention, I alluded to the tardiness in the implementation of collective decisions, particularly on the subject of the sustainable development of small island developing States. A total of six summit conferences have been held over a period of 11 years to address the issues of the environment and development in those vulnerable island States.

Donor countries have not fulfilled their end of that partnership. Official development assistance continues to fall, and multilateral aid has dropped significantly. Ten years later, another high-level meeting is scheduled to take place in Mauritius in 2004 to review the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action.

My delegation is hopeful that the occasion will be used to ensure that the priority issues facing small States will be addressed in a way that gives optimism to the millions whose lives depend on a commitment to the following issues: improving their preparedness for, and recovery from, natural and environmental disasters; addressing the problem of climate change and sea-level rise, which could submerge low-lying nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific; preventing worsening shortages of potable water; developing solar and renewable energy to lessen dependence on expensive imported oil; and managing growth in tourism to protect the environmental and cultural integrity of our nations.

My delegation's appeal to this session of the General Assembly is for all stakeholders, including the multilateral financial institutions, demonstrate their total commitment to the entire process in order that efforts to implement outstanding important commitments can be finalized.

Despite the uncertainty over adequate funding for implementation, my delegation remains confident, Mr. President, that, with your ability to lead and build consensus, this fifty-eighth session will become known as the General Assembly of implementation.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently stated:

> "We all live on the same planet, buffeted by the same winds, influenced by the same currents of change. But instead of acting on what unites us ... we allow a chasm to persist between us ... We need to mend this great divide with a new fabric of solidarity".

My delegation is convinced that we have the opportunity to build and develop this new kind of solidarity and partnership between rich and poor, big and small, powerful and weak, at this session of the General Assembly. The opportunity is ours to embrace or to lose.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. François Lonsény Fall, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guinea.

Mr. Fall (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): On 19 August 2003, the international community took a blow to the body in Baghdad in odious acts that caused the tragic loss of approximately 20 United Nations officials, including the lamented Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General. By attacking a symbol as prestigious as the United Nations, the forces of evil intended to destroy the firm resolve of our Organization to carry out its mission of safeguarding international peace and security.

Those unspeakable crimes demonstrate once again the intensity of terrorism in all its forms and underscore the vital need for the international community to reaffirm its solidarity in order to find the ways and means to stamp out this scourge, which remains one of the greatest threats to humankind's harmonious development. My delegation energetically condemns those vile acts and pays tribute to the memory of the victims. It renews to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, the sincere compassion of the people and Government of Guinea, particularly of His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea.

My delegation also wishes to take this opportunity to express its deep gratitude to Mr. Annan for the courage and the effectiveness with which he is leading the destiny of our Organization. The Republic of Guinea will be unstinting in its efforts to make its contribution to the influence of the United Nations, which, it hardly needs to be said, remains the primary framework for concerted action in the conduct of international relations.

I wish to take this opportunity to convey my delegation's warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. Appreciating your great ability, there can be no doubt that you will skilfully follow up the work of your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, whose dedication and skill were greatly appreciated in the course of the previous session.

Africa, where more than one third of the population lives in absolute poverty, continues, alas, to be the scene of fratricidal wars, whose negative effects undermine the development policies of its States. Notwithstanding that bitter state of affairs, marked progress has been made in extinguishing hotbeds of tension. Hope is reborn in West Africa.

Sierra Leone is being stabilized, thanks to the active support of the international community, but also, and above all, thanks to the patriotism of Sierra Leoneans and the determination of their leaders to close the book on war. My country, while expressing its appreciation for the respect shown for the criteria for the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), takes the view that the success of that plan also hinges on increased assistance to Sierra Leone, as well as the effective restoration of State authority throughout the territory.

In Liberia, with the departure of President Charles Taylor on 11 August, a new era is becoming apparent for that country, scarred by 14 years of fratricidal war, which augurs well for the subregion as a whole — particularly the Mano River basin, whose overall development has long been jeopardized. We wish to pay tribute to the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations that have made it possible to secure a ceasefire and to achieve the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, thus opening the way for the establishment of a Government of transition and national reconciliation. My delegation appeals to the international community for effective support for the implementation of the Accra accord, so that Liberians can finally be reconciled among themselves and can tackle the reconstruction of their country in renewed democracy.

The joint action undertaken by ECOWAS, the United Nations and the development partners to deploy the multinational force and ensure the maintenance of peace in Liberia should be supported and welcomed. The establishment of this stabilization force has proved vital to facilitate the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to make it possible to carry out a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and to promote the return of refugees and national reconciliation.

However, my country remains convinced that the perpetrators of hateful crimes must answer for their acts. That is why we support unreservedly the decisions of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in its fight against impunity. That is a moral and political requirement.

In Côte d'Ivoire, my delegation urges all the parties to pursue dialogue to implement effectively the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, and thus achieve national reconciliation.

In Guinea-Bissau, recent developments have made even more fragile a situation that was already precarious because of years of political instability and economic crisis. My delegation appeals for the creation of better conditions for a rapid return to normal constitutional life, which is vital to the recovery of that fraternal country.

Guinea attaches great importance to the restoration of lasting peace in our subregion. It has paid a heavy price in terms of instability, whose negative consequences have impeded its progress.

Despite a particularly difficult economic situation marked by the drastic drop in bauxite and aluminium prices and the soaring price of petroleum, Guinea continues to tackle the burden of refugees and displaced persons. I wish to reiterate the Guinean Government's appeal to the donor community for increased assistance in managing refugees and displaced persons and for strengthening the capacity of our country to pursue its programme to combat poverty while consolidating its democratic achievements.

I would like to address the situation in the Great Lakes region, where there are promising prospects. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite the humanitarian crisis in the eastern part, considerable progress has been made, particularly in the context of the disengagement of foreign armed forces and current demobilization and reintegration operations. We hope that the Transitional Government of National Unity will do its utmost to preserve the territorial integrity of the country and to promote a return to normal constitutional life.

My delegation appeals to the international community to support the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) with the resources necessary to carry out its mandate, which has been enhanced by Security Council resolution 1493 (2003).

In Burundi, my delegation welcomes the encouraging results in the implementation of the Arusha Agreement and calls on all parties to put an end to hostilities to strengthen the peace, which is still fragile, and to promote humanitarian assistance.

In the Central African Republic, my delegation appreciates the commitment of the new authorities to promote the return to constitutional legality in the context of consensual management.

In the Horn of Africa, the permanent and binding commitment of Ethiopia and Eritrea concerning the delimitation of borders is a prelude to the return to peace between the two countries. With regard to Somalia, my delegation hopes that the Mbagathi Conference in Kenya will make it possible to overcome past contradictions and restore comprehensive everlasting peace.

I cannot fail to address the thorny question of the Western Sahara, which has mobilized the energies of the international community for decades. The Republic of Guinea, which has always advocated a peaceful settlement of the issue, remains convinced of the urgent need for a political settlement under the auspices the United Nations — the only body that can guarantee a fair and lasting solution that is mutually acceptable to all parties.

The future of our continent is closely bound up with international peace and security, and so we will continue to express our profound concern about conflicts that cause upheavals in other parts of the world.

First, in the Middle East, the appointment of Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, the publication of the Quartet's road map and the establishment of a unilateral cease-fire by the Palestinian armed groups had given us grounds for hope. These hopes,

unfortunately, are threatened by the resumption of the cycle of violence. We have together a historic duty to salvage peace. The international community and the Quartet must do everything to give a fresh impetus to the dialogue between the parties. For their part, Palestinians and Israelis have the obligation to honour their respective commitments, in order to win mutual trust.

My delegation is convinced that a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the crisis in the Middle East necessarily involves tackling the Lebanese and Syrian aspects and the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Guinea, which has always been at the forefront in defending legitimate struggles for just causes, hails the historic role of President Yasser Arafat in restoring the inalienable rights of the martyred people of Palestine. Here we reiterate our firm opposition to any attempt to undermine his political or physical integrity, and once again send him our sympathy and support. We also encourage the new Prime Minister of Palestine, Mr. Ahmed Qorei, to do his utmost to create favourable conditions for dialogue aiming at a durable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On the question of Iraq, which is going through a phase that is crucial for its future, my delegation encourages the United Nations to continue and strengthen its peace mission and its mission of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance so that the Iraqis can quickly take charge of their country's destiny in unity and democracy.

With regard to Afghanistan, the international community needs to step up its assistance, particularly in the area of security and development assistance, so as to give support to the Transitional Administration, in implementation of the Bonn Agreement.

My delegation urges on the Korean peninsula the parties to pursue their efforts to achieve the peaceful and independent reunification of the two Koreas and to settle the nuclear issue by dialogue.

The Guinean Government reaffirms its commitment to the principle of a single China. It welcomes the efforts being made by the People's Republic of China to safeguard international peace and security.

Concerning the crisis in Cyprus, whose resolution is still bogged down, in spite of the Secretary-General's determination, we appeal to the parties to show political will, so that they may return to the negotiating table on the basis of the revised plan.

Poverty, armed conflicts, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, organized transnational crime and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, continue to be major obstacles to peace, security and development. Safeguarding international peace and security depends on our commitment to eradicating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as mercenary activities, all of which fuel conflicts, particularly in Africa.

This is all the more true since in July, in this very Hall, Member States were able, at the First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, were able to gauge the devastating effects of light weapons, whose major victims, unfortunately, continue to be women and children. My delegation reiterates the appeal by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for adequate financial assistance to effectively implement the moratorium on small arms and light weapons. It also calls for effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1467 (2003), adopted at the end of the workshop organized by my country when it held the presidency of the Council in March 2003, on the theme "Proliferation of small arms and light weapons and mercenary activities: threats to peace and security in West Africa."

Mindful of their primary responsibilities for the recovery of the continent, African leaders are continuing their efforts in implementing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) effectively. The commitments undertaken at the second summit of African Union heads of State at Maputo are part of this process. Guinea welcomes the support of the international community, particularly the G-8 countries for the African Union and its programme, NEPAD. We also welcome the initiatives taken by development partners to increase public assistance, relieve debt and provide for improved access to markets.

Guinea welcomes also the useful arrangements planned by the United States, the European Union and Japan to combat the HIV/AIDS, malaria and

tuberculosis pandemics, as well as food insecurity. These efforts, which we encourage, were undoubtedly strengthened by the recent agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO) enabling the poorest countries to have access to generic drugs and thus to tackle the health tragedy of 6 million deaths annually as a result of those three pandemics alone.

My delegation, however, regrets the lack of consensus at Cancún at the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the WTO. We remain convinced that the international community will continue the debate, aiming at further integration of the weaker economies into the world trading system. We need to do our utmost to ensure that globalization is better managed and less iniquitous. The common good must be at the heart of our concerns.

The path ahead of us is still long and full of pitfalls. The midterm review shows that, at least as far as Africa is concerned, there is not great optimism abut achieving the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. We hope that the spirit of solidarity which is still developing at the level of the international community can be translated into tangible acts and galvanize everyone to action, so that future generations will acknowledge our struggle to ensure the development of humankind. In order to achieve this, we must reaffirm our unity and promote multilaterism to enable our common Organization to tackle the challenges of peace, security and social and economic progress.

The latest developments in the international situation have demonstrated the extent to which the United Nations is still the unique framework for consultation and concerted action in the management of world affairs. Strengthening the role and capacities of the United Nations is therefore more than ever essential in order to provide fair, lasting and equitable solutions to issues of major importance. My delegation appreciates the efforts to reform the United Nations and revitalize the work of the General Assembly.

In this regard, we support the recommendation of the Secretary-General concerning the setting up of a high-level panel to propose ways to strengthen the United Nations by reforming its institutions.

All these steps to help improve the effectiveness of the Organization must of course be underpinned by a genuine reform of the Security Council so as to make its membership more representative. This will make it possible to enhance its transparency and give all States, large and small, the opportunity to find a voice there and thus make their due contribution to the building of a renewed world.

The President: I now give the floor to the Honourable Knowlson Gift, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Gift (Trinidad and Tobago): It is indeed a signal honour for me to extend to you, Sir and to the Government and people of the sister Caribbean Community (CARICOM) State of Saint Lucia our heartfelt congratulations on your election to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We are confident that, under your experienced and pragmatic leadership, the Assembly will address in a forthright manner the many and varied challenges which confront the international community.

My delegation is equally confident, Sir, that the developing-country perspective that your presidency will bring to our deliberations will serve to highlight the plight of the weak and the vulnerable among us, as we struggle to come to terms with the realities of contemporary international relations.

Mr. President, please allow me the opportunity to express our satisfaction at the astute leadership shown by your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, and at the many initiatives that he pursued during his tenure, including those in the areas of institutional strengthening and the prevention of armed conflict, in an attempt to restore to this body its central role, as mandated by the Charter. I also applaud his inclusive approach to advocacy, evinced by his short but fruitful visit to Trinidad and Tobago in February this year to engage in a brief, interactive high-level dialogue with the heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community on the work of the Assembly and on some of the major issues before this global forum as they relate to small States.

It would be remiss of me if I did not compliment the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his sterling performance in the face of the myriad crises since our last session. We have total confidence in his continuing stewardship of this unique world body. My delegation wishes to assure him of the total support of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for his untiring efforts to ensure the continued relevance of the United Nations in the

pursuit and achievement of the Organization's objectives.

Trinidad and Tobago joins the rest of the international community in expressing our profound sorrow at the tragic loss of life suffered most recently by men and women of the United Nations while on a humanitarian mission in Iraq, as a result of the bombing on 19 August 2003 of the United Nations office in Baghdad. We shall forever remember them in our prayers, together with those others who, over the years, have made the supreme sacrifice in selfless service to the Organization and, by extension, to mankind. We are of the view that consideration should be given to the erection of a fitting memorial here, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, to honour all those who have given their lives in the field in the service of the United Nations.

The United Nations cannot retreat from its global responsibilities in the face of even such an atrocity. We are firmly convinced that the United Nations — born out of the destruction wrought by the Second World War and representing the collective hope of mankind to spare future generations from the scourge of war — must rise to this difficult challenge and continue to play an even more central and proactive role in managing world affairs, particularly with respect to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The challenge before us is to make the world peaceful and secure. That is a particular concern of small States, which must rely on the international rule of law, on the strict observance by all States of the purposes and principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, and on the collective security mechanism of the Security Council in order to guarantee their right to a secure, sovereign and peaceful existence. We must therefore work to strengthen the rule of law worldwide as well as the capacity of the United Nations to engage both in conflict prevention and in the management of global crises that disrupt international peace and security. It is also of paramount importance that all Member States commit to and uphold the multilateral approach in our collective efforts to attain those ends.

Nowhere is there a more pressing need for peace and security than in the Middle East. Clearly, a just and lasting peace is in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis, who have been constant witnesses to death and destruction in their respective societies and who have watched as their once promising economies have been devastated by the unceasing instability in the region. Peace continues to be elusive, notwithstanding the latest best efforts of the Quartet, whose road map for measured and reciprocal steps within a specific time frame enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of the international community.

There can be no peace and prosperity for that region without the political will of leaders on both sides of the conflict. Neither can there be progress on the path of peace without focused and sustained effort on the part of the international community in providing the necessary political support to the parties directly involved. My delegation is of the opinion that, under the present circumstances, consideration should be given to deployment of a United Nations force so that realistic and mutually acceptable confidence-building measures can be put in place, thereby restoring some measure of security to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

In Iraq, the goals of the international community at this time must be the restoration of a climate of peace and security and the creation of the conditions that are necessary for the building by the Iraqi people of a peaceful, secure and prosperous society. The United Nations has a pivotal role to play with regard to both nation-building and the political transition in Iraq. We therefore call for greater coherence among the members of the Security Council, and urge them to adopt such measures as are necessary in the security interests of all concerned to bring that situation within the parameters of international political legitimacy and so give free rein to the aspirations of the Iraqi people.

Threats to international peace and security are certainly not posed by State actors exclusively. The activities of organized criminal groups engaged in the illegal drug trade and in the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of some States, despite the efforts made at all levels.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, Governments the world over have joined forces even more resolutely in their condemnation of terrorism and have endeavoured to give effect to all the measures called for in the relevant decisions of the Security Council, including by subscribing to all international treaties aimed at combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The international community must, however, also turn its attention once more to

addressing the root causes of this now-global phenomenon with a view to alleviating — if not removing altogether — the more pressing concerns that provide a basis for acts of terror.

Even as we remain resolute in the war on terrorism, and focus on the traditional issues of peace and security, we must be mindful of the need to make progress on the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals, which world leaders outlined at the Millennium Summit in 2000. The challenges we face are not confined to the issues of peace and security as defined in their traditional sense. Indeed, success in dealing with threats to international peace and security may ultimately depend on the progress we make in overcoming poverty and in dealing with injustice, intolerance, deprivation and diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of those non-conventional threats that are fast approaching global crises. Even though Africa remains the hardest hit, the disease is spreading fast in Asia and in Eastern Europe. In the Caribbean — which is second only to sub-Saharan Africa in HIV/AIDS prevalence rates — HIV/AIDS is a major development challenge threatening to reverse years of hard-won human development gains and increase poverty levels. The General Assembly has just concluded a high-level debate on HIV/AIDS, and my delegation trusts that that meeting will provide the necessary impetus and lay the groundwork for further meaningful support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Unless those with the capacity to contribute come forward with additional resources, many, many more lives will surely be lost.

Without a secure and peaceful international environment, and in the absence of a sustained effort on the part of our development partners to live up to the commitments made at major United Nations conferences, there can be no meaningful and sustained global economic advancement for Africa as it seeks to implement the New Partnership for Africa's Development, or for the least developed countries, the landlocked countries or the small island developing States.

Trinidad and Tobago continues to attach high importance to the need for the international community to pay special attention to the unique challenges and problems which confront small island developing States and to full and effective implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It is for that reason that we participated actively last year in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We were pleased that the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation reinforced the view that small island developing States are a special case in terms of both the environment and development.

The Johannesburg Summit also recognized that, although small island developing States continue to take the lead in the path towards sustainable development, they remain increasingly constrained by the interplay of adverse factors such as their small size, fragility, isolation and vulnerability.

It is for this reason that Trinidad and Tobago will play host next week to the Caribbean small island developing States regional preparatory meeting, one of four regional meetings being held by small island developing States in order to identify and develop inputs for the review of the Barbados Programme of Action. Implementation has been the Achilles heel of the Programme of Action. Small island developing States have taken the lead in our efforts to achieve sustainable development. We need, however, the support of the international community.

We trust that the international meeting to review the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, to be held in Mauritius in 2004, will not only better enable us to evaluate the Barbados Programme of Action, but ultimately lead to an enhanced level of political commitment and increased financial and technical assistance for small island developing States on the part of the international community.

Another issue of the utmost concern to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, to all CARICOM Governments, is the continued trans-shipment of nuclear waste through the Caribbean Sea. The reassurances of adequate safeguards do not constitute guarantees against the potentially devastating impact of an accident on our economies and ecosystems. We therefore once more call upon the States concerned to cease this practice.

Recent events have also pointed to the challenges faced by many countries in the area of governance. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago,

which was elected in recent multi-party elections that were peaceful, free and fair, is committed to efficient and transparent Government, to ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, to the devolution of resources and decision-making to the local levels of government, and to the meaningful participation of all its citizens in the formulation of public policy.

The Government has also set itself the goal of achieving developed country status by 2020, with the aim of providing to all its citizens by that date a high quality of life in all areas, including education, health, employment, housing, transportation, telecommunications, water and electricity. This the Government hopes to achieve by allocating a sizeable portion of its national budget to programmes of human-resource development and of economic infrastructure and institutional development, as well as social programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty.

But our national goals can only be achieved if our domestic efforts are complemented by efforts at the international level to achieve greater international economic stability and a more equitable distribution of resources among States, and if the benefits of free trade are more widely shared, particularly by those countries whose incorporation into the world economy places them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their developed country partners. The new opportunities occasioned by globalization and trade liberalization, which we consider to be a positive force for good, should be available to all, and not to just a privileged few. We must avoid further marginalization of the vulnerable States among us. Given the central role of trade in the achievement of economic expansion, the failure of the recent World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún to agree on issues critical to developing countries does not augur well for our future economic well-being or for that of the least developed, landlocked and small island developing States among us. We are hopeful for greater flexibility on the part of our developed countries' negotiating partners in Geneva next December, which is necessary if any progress is to be achieved.

The quest for economic and social justice for all peoples cannot be divorced from the fervent desire of all peoples to live in freedom and without fear for their lives. The growing religious and ethnic diversity of our societies highlights the ever-present need for mutual respect for and tolerance of the diversity that today is a characteristic of many communities. The lack of such tolerance and respect has fuelled once again in our lifetime the horrific crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

To deter the commission of such crimes in the future, and in order to deal with flagrant abuses of the fundamental human rights and freedom of the individual, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person, the international community established the International Criminal Court (ICC), which this year has made substantial progress in establishing its principal organs, through the election of its Judges, Chief Prosecutor, Deputy Prosecutor and the Registrar.

The ICC does not represent victor's justice, but a universal and shared symbol of morality based on the fundamental principle that those individuals who commit the serious crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court will, with the broad support of the international community, be brought to trial before such a tribunal, but only where their national Governments are unable or unwilling to do so.

Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the efficient and effective functioning of this permanent International Criminal Court, and deplores all efforts to undermine its integrity and the commitment of its States Parties to carry out in good faith the obligations into which they have freely entered through their adherence to the Rome Statute of the ICC. We call for wider adherence to the Statute by all States, so that it may one day have universal application. Only a universal commitment by all States to strive to eliminate the culture of impunity for such heinous crimes will successfully stem the tide of the horrific events that continue to mar our world.

Several speakers in this general debate have referred to the crisis in multilateralism and the need for the reform of the United Nations to make it more relevant to present day realities. It is in this context that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago welcomes the call made by the Secretary-General in his statement to the General Assembly on 23 September for a thorough restructuring of the post-Second-World-War institutional architecture of the United Nations through the reform and strengthening of its major organs. His stated intention to pursue an approach through the modality of a panel of eminent persons enjoys the full support of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We would not wish at this time,

to prejudge the outcome of the work of such a panel, but would hope that it will recognize the role that small States play in international affairs.

We expect the panel's final recommendations to take the form of specific proposals for amendments to the Charter that will be able to command the widest possible support of the international community at the highest political levels. The reform exercise must have as its ultimate objective the strengthening of the United Nations and an enhancement of its capacity to respond to the new global challenges.

We must also ensure that the long overdue reform of the Security Council takes place. Expansion of the Council's membership to make it more democratic and representative can only confer greater legitimacy on the Council and on the Organization as a whole.

Most importantly, we must better empower the General Assembly, the most representative of all the organs of the United Nations, to play its role more effectively as the chief deliberative and policy-making organ of the Organization.

No other institution has the inclusiveness or the legitimacy that the United Nations has. We must therefore spare no effort to make it a more effective instrument in the service of all the peoples of the world.

In conclusion, the stark international situation calls for more, not less, international cooperation in facing the countless challenges that confront countries large and small. We must seek to implement urgently new and better policies aimed at the prevention of armed conflict. We must make fuller use of the few opportunities for economic and social progress that present themselves. We must demonstrate the necessary political will to maintain a peaceful and secure international environment that is conducive to the uplifting and well-being of all humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rogatien Biaou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Biaou (Benin) *(spoke in French)*: Mr. President, you have the honour and privilege of guiding the work of the General Assembly at a time when the United Nations is at a crossroads. The international situation is marked today by doubt, anguish and disillusionment. Faced with the many conflicts and acts of terrorism that beset our world, and with the constant disquieting increase in poverty, we must acknowledge that the end of ideological confrontation did not bring the world either peace or the development so hoped for by the founding fathers of this Organization. Therefore, in conveying my heartfelt and warm congratulations to you on your election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth regular session, I would like in particular to convey my wishes for courage and success in discharging this noble mission and assure you of the support of my country, Benin.

My delegation would also like to convey a well-deserved tribute, to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, and to congratulate him on the results obtained during his presidency in defining modalities for implementing the outcomes of the major conferences held under the aegis of the United Nations.

Allow me also to congratulate, in particular, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on the courage, skill and resolve with which he is guiding our Organization, an irreplaceable instrument for the promotion and maintenance of world peace.

My delegation is grateful to him for his constancy in dealing with events that shook our universal Organization during this year. He understood how to bring the necessary clear-sightedness, with his unshakeable faith in the ability of the international community, to provide a concerted response to urgent problems of our time while rejecting any confusion of roles. In so doing he saved our Organization from scorn and collapse.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Whenever the United Nations has been called into question, faced with a challenge to its very existence, it has stood up and reaffirmed its usefulness in managing situations as the guarantor of international law.

The terrorist attacks against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, which caused many casualties, profoundly shocked and enraged the people and Government of Benin. The United Nations does not deserve this kind of gratuitous barbarity perpetrated against its staff, who are devoted to the cause of rebuilding Iraq.

Benin reiterates its sincere condolences to the family of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello as well as to the

families of all the other victims of the explosion. We once again convey to them our solidarity and support.

My country reiterates to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his associates our admiration for the courage and conviction with which, every day, they do their jobs. This act should not shake their firm determination to defend the cause of humanity, and should be a new source of commitment to attain the goals of the United Nations.

Our support for the United Nations and the Secretary-General is based on Benin's commitment to multilateralism, which is and must remain the linchpin for the new order that the international community is striving to build.

If there is one area in which our Organization has made some progress in strengthening its effectiveness, it is in the prevention, management and settlement of armed conflicts. It has given real meaning to its action in this area by clearly defining modalities for implementing peacekeeping operations.

My country endorses the conclusions and recommendations of the Secretary-General on conflict prevention, particularly in the areas of poverty eradication, transparency in the area of arms, the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and weapons of mass destruction and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The gravity of the situation prevailing in Africa makes the continent a central concern of the international community. Given the seriousness of Africa's problems, the United Nations and its Member States owe it to themselves to step up their support for African initiatives to reverse negative tendencies and to avoid any prolonged destabilization of the continent.

At its recent summit held in Maputo, Mozambique, the African Union gave a forceful demonstration of its resolve to acquire the means to tackle its problems. The conference elected all the senior officials of the African Union Commission. The new team should strive to develop and maintain relations of partnership with the world, based on Africa's priorities. Benin hopes that this new team will enjoy the trust and support of the international community in order to restore peace on the continent by eliminating various pockets of tension and through the promotion and implementation of development programmes.

We also commend the work done in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which embodies the hope for the revitalization of the continent through combined synergies produced by implementation of the main points of this programme, which is based upon consensus.

The importance accorded by the G-8 to the promotion of peace and stability in Africa is an important step forward. This new commitment will give Africa the means to contain the many conflicts and latent crises that are fraught with serious danger and unimaginable consequences. Benin is prepared to cooperate to establish this work plan so that by 2010 Africa will have an inter-African peacekeeping force, an essential instrument for political stability, without which Africa would be unable to tackle urgent tasks of economic and social development. The Security Council missions to Central Africa and West Africa in June and July this year highlighted the crucial need to have this mechanism as a permanent presence.

Developments in Africa since our fifty-seventh session, and the facts gathered on the ground by the Council missions reaffirm one unavoidable fact, that the effective mobilization and rapid deployment of troops to the field is decisive in managing armed conflicts in Africa, as indeed it is everywhere else on our planet.

The speedy reaction of the international community was crucial in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, where Operation Licorne and the deployment of the contingent of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI), made it possible to help warring brothers to silence their arms and embark on a dialogue in order to preserve the territorial integrity of Côte d'Ivoire.

The restoration of calm should not lead us to underestimate the seriousness of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, where the political crisis is far from over. Major problems remain to be resolved, and it is important that an international military presence be maintained in Côte d'Ivoire in order to maintain conditions conducive to dialogue regarding implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis agreements for a return to normality.

Furthermore, the rapid reaction by the Central African States and Nigeria made it possible to put an

end to the coup d'état in Sao Tome and Principe and to return to power the democratically elected President.

Likewise, just a few weeks ago in Guinea-Bissau, immediate action and initiatives taken by ECOWAS prompted the perpetrators of the coup d'état to enter into a negotiating process aimed at a short transition leading up to the organization of presidential and legislative elections.

The authorization to send a multinational force and a United Nations stabilization force to Liberia, under Chapter VII of the Charter, gave a clear signal of the international community's determination to end the conflict there. The impact of these steps is very encouraging, and we welcome the signing, in Accra on 18 August this year, of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Recent political developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have continuously highlighted the importance of the need to hold an international conference on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

The complexity of phenomena in Africa requires the Secretary-General to maintain an ongoing dialogue with African leaders and to adopt common approaches to relevant issues. That is why Benin welcomes the establishment of the Office and the appointment of an Under-Secretary-General as the Special Adviser on Africa.

The implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a genuinely African initiative, has made significant progress this year. It has become increasingly detailed in programme design and in its specific projects for agriculture, the environment, energy and information and communications technologies. The involvement of civil society has been effective in expanding the social basis of NEPAD and as a way of involving peoples in its implementation. Benin urgently appeals to the international community to enhance its support for NEPAD, as it did in Tokyo in the context of the Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development.

In this regard, it is important that the United Nations operational activities be buttressed by strategies based on effective partnership with all stakeholders in the development process. They must help implement concrete projects that have a real impact on the living and working conditions of peoples with a view to poverty eradication. Indeed, the annual rise in the number of poor people in the world has become increasingly distressing. It makes us question ever more deeply the current world order and the sincerity of the determination of the international community — in particular, that of the development institutions and the rich countries — to combat poverty and to promote genuine sustainable development.

It is true that the absence of democracy, corruption and poor governance are tragic scourges in that they exacerbate poverty and impede development. There is no doubt, however, that the least developed countries have undertaken extremely courageous economic and political reforms at the cost of enormous sacrifices made by their populations. That is why we remain concerned by the low rate of implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and call on the international community and our bilateral and multilateral partners to demonstrate greater solidarity and responsibility. My Government strongly favours a substantial increase in resources made available to the various assistance funds, in particular the United Nations Capital Development Fund, which is working to eliminate poverty.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ended less than a month ago in Cancún. My country, Benin, which is the Chairman of the Coordination Bureau for the Least Developed Countries, attended with the firm determination to establish a candid and constructive dialogue with the developed countries. The goal was to find a solution to the dysfunctional free trade system, which prevents the developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, from enjoying their comparative advantages in the agricultural sector. The sectoral initiative on cotton introduced by Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad targeted that specific issue.

History will record the Conference as a failure. My delegation nevertheless believes that, despite the difficulties, Cancún moved the negotiations forward. It was an opportunity for the least developed countries to state some of their concerns, in particular those related to the practice of subsidizing non-competitive agricultural producers. This practice is literally strangling the cotton growers of the underdeveloped countries, particularly in West Africa.

Benin should like to reopen discussions so that the trade negotiations begun in Doha can effectively offer new prospects for the development of the least developed countries. We must establish transparent pricing on the world market and open up markets in order to allow competitive countries to produce and sell their products at remunerative prices. This is of tremendous importance to African cotton-producing countries, because the future of a sector that has been developed at great cost, with the assistance of the international community, is at stake. Our Organization would gain in credibility if it could find a way to guarantee our peoples their right to subsistence.

Indeed, who on this Earth has never worn a cotton shirt, dress or loincloth? Who among us here has never used cotton to clean or bind a wound? The progressive disappearance of the cotton sector will have unimaginable implications and consequences for our comfort in clothing and other needs of all humankind. The time has come, therefore, for the developed countries to hear the voice of the poor peasants labouring under the sun and rain in Africa. While globalization may require considerable structural adjustments, it is increasingly necessary that its concomitant sacrifices be parcelled out fairly. This will require the rich countries to assume their responsibility to give the peoples of the least developed countries a chance at survival.

In 2004, the international community will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. That will be an important event, to which my delegation should like to draw the attention of the international community in order to spotlight the role of the family in our society and the part it can play in meeting contemporary challenges. To that end, Benin proposes the convening of a regional African conference in 2004 and calls for the support of the Secretariat for such an event.

At the national level, since our last session Benin has met two significant challenges in the entrenchment of our democratic process launched in February 1990. The decentralization of our territorial administration was achieved following our municipal and communal elections of December 2002. Those elections marked the conclusion of a fundamental reform of State administration in Benin, which is now structured around decentralized, financially autonomous communes led by elected mayors who are accountable to the people. This reform has created the optimal conditions for grass-roots democracy and has allowed the people to participate actively in public administration and thus to become real stakeholders in local community development. Elections for deputies to the fourth legislature were also held in March 2003. These two elections were free, transparent and democratic. They took place calmly and peacefully. They made a further contribution to strengthening the democratic rebirth of Benin.

These concrete achievements attest to the vitality and stability of our national institutions and to their effective contribution to the ongoing strengthening of the constitutional order in Benin. This historic opportunity for Benin to enjoy peace and stability in a subregion beset by recurring internal armed conflicts implies a certain responsibility with regard to our contribution to the international community's efforts to promote democracy throughout the world and to restore peace in countries in conflict, particularly in Africa.

It was in recognition of this firm commitment of Benin's that the General Assembly entrusted us with the organization, from 4 to 6 December 2000, of the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies. For nearly three years, Benin chaired the follow-up mechanism to that Conference; it recently transferred that chairmanship to Mongolia, which organized the Fifth Conference from 10 to 12 September 2003. My country welcomes the outcome of the Ulan Bator Conference. We remain committed to the principle of periodic assessment of democratic practices. We will spare no effort in implementing the Ulam Bator Declaration and Plan of Action.

The active and effective participation of Benin in peacekeeping operations decided upon or authorized by the Security Council also makes clear my country's resolute commitment to democracy, the maintenance of peace and security in the world and international solidarity. It is in that context that Benin's candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for 2004 and 2005 should be seen. In that context, Benin will resolutely strive to strengthen the crucial partnership that the Security Council is endeavouring to establish with regional and subregional organizations in the area of peacekeeping. Benin is counting on the support of the entire international community so that we can have the privilege of serving, at such a high level, the cause of peace and international security.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Said Abdella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea.

Mr. Abdella (Eritrea) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I should like to begin by extending to Mr. Julian Hunte sincere congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. The Eritrean delegation is convinced that, under his wise guidance, this session will address, with vision and courage, the challenging issues that are confronting the world.

My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to express appreciation and thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for the wisdom and skill he displayed in leading the session to a successful conclusion. We also pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for his steadfast commitment to the cause of peace and development — the twin pillars of the United Nations Charter.

Eritrea pays tribute to and thanks the facilitators and guarantors of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and its partners, the troop- and observer-contributing countries, as well as donor countries, for the assistance they generously extended to ensure the success of the peace process. It also urges them not to be discouraged by the recent negative developments and to continue their assistance, which is essential for the achievement of peace and security in our region.

Eritrea would like to bring to the Assembly's attention the dangerous developments that are threatening to destroy the peace process between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In a message communicated to the Secretary-General, on 19 September 2003, Ethiopia officially rejected the decision of the Boundary Commission and threatened to unleash another war of aggression against Eritrea if the terms and conditions it had set were not met.

It should be recalled that Ethiopia declared war on Eritrea in 1998 because it claimed ownership of the sovereign Eritrean town of Badme. At that time, we made every possible diplomatic effort to prevent an unwarranted and unjustifiable war — prior to and in the aftermath of Ethiopia's official declaration of war. Unfortunately, that sent the wrong signal to Ethiopia and prompted the regime in power to pursue — with impunity — its policy of belligerence, and to unleash successive military offensives that that resulted in a great loss of life and the destruction of property.

After a cycle of senseless and bloody military clashes, reason prevailed, with the signing of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Algiers in June and December 2000, respectively. A Boundary Commission, empowered to be the final arbiter for the boundary claims, was subsequently created. The Commission announced its final and binding decision on 13 April 2002. Badme was confirmed by the Commission's decision as being sovereign Eritrean territory.

In spite of its treaty obligations to respect and duly implement the final and binding decision of the Boundary Commission, however, Ethiopia has chosen to flout international law and practice. Thus, its rejection of the entire decision and its denunciation of the Commission follow a series of major violations of the Algiers Agreements, including the illegal deployment of troops and the building of settlements in sovereign Eritrean territory, the aggravation of the suffering of over 60,000 Eritrean citizens, who remain displaced from their home villages in the temporary security zone, and the delay of demarcation because of obstructions caused by its tactics to prevent preparatory field work. That has resulted in huge financial cost to the international community.

As most Members will have been informed by now, the Ethiopian Prime Minister declared, in a letter of 19 September to the Secretary-General, that the boundary demarcation process is "in terminal crisis". The Prime Minister heaped insults on the Boundary Commission, dismissed its judgement as "totally illegal, unjust and irresponsible" and called on the Security Council to set up "an alternative mechanism" to demarcate the contested parts of the boundary. He further suggested that UNMEE should pack up and leave, and pleaded for international recognition and endorsement of Ethiopia's occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories.

Ethiopia's provocative letter represents nothing less than an unprecedented assault on the fundamental principles of international law and the key tenets of the Algiers peace agreements, as well as Security Council resolution 1507 (2003). It is full of blatant lies and distortions in its account of the legal principles and

findings that the Boundary Commission invoked in determining the location of Badme.

The Prime Minister's letter contrasts sharply with the public statement of his Government when the Boundary Commission announced its decision on 13 April 2002. At that time, Ethiopia urged the international community to put intense pressure on Eritrea to accept and implement the decision of the Boundary Commission fully and faithfully. It declared full legal victory and even bragged about its "successful litigation strategy that hinged on a maximalist approach" of exaggerating its claims to include territories that never belonged to it. This blatant revelation, which is in fact true, was repeated by both the Prime Minister and his Minister for Foreign Affairs in a report to the Ethiopian Parliament as recently as last month.

Let me now briefly address some of the issues raised in the Ethiopian letter.

First, article 4.2 of the Algiers Peace Agreement unambiguously states that:

> "a neutral Boundary Commission composed of five members shall be established with a mandate to delimit and demarcate the colonial treaty border based on the pertinent colonial treaties (1900, 1902, 1908) and applicable international law."

Article 4.15 further states:

> "The parties agree that the delimitation and demarcation determinations of the Commission shall be final and binding. Each party shall respect the border so determined, as well as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the other party".

Therefore, Ethiopia cannot thus arbitrarily and unilaterally discard these key provisions of the peace agreement or urge the Security Council to set up a new mechanism.

Secondly, the Temporary Security Zone was never intended or set up to create a provisional boundary. Article 10 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement specifically states that this will not prejudge the final status of the contested areas, which will be determined at the end of the delimitation and demarcation of the boundary. In this regard, it is instructive to note that the Boundary Commission had notified both parties, in its delimitation decision of 13 April 2002, to recognize and respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity as determined by the delimitation decision pending demarcation on the ground. The boundary is thus already determined. This is reinforced by Security Council resolution 1507 (2003), which calls on both parties to recognize and respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Ethiopia's ludicrous suggestion of "recognizing the southern boundary of the Temporary Security Zone" as the boundary between the two countries" thus represents a flagrant violation of the Algiers Peace Agreements and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, UNMEE's mandate shall terminate when the delimitation-demarcation process of the border has been completed, pursuant to article 5 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Ethiopia will again commit a gross violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement if, as it has intimated in its letter, it requests UNMEE to leave before completing its task. Obviously, Ethiopia's primary concern is not the financial burden that UNMEE's prolonged presence would entail for the international community.

Ethiopia is, in fact, guilty of a litany of obstructions and violations that have in the past prevented expeditious demarcation. It cannot now shed crocodile tears or preach to the international community on ways and means of reducing financial costs. If this is a thinly veiled threat meant to convey to us its intentions of unleashing war, our response is that Ethiopia will be the sole party responsible for endangering regional peace and stability.

As the main guarantor of the Algiers Peace Agreement, the Security Council has legal treaty obligations to prevent war. Indeed, in accordance with article 14 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, the Security Council should urgently consider Ethiopia's flagrant violations of the Algiers Peace Agreement and take appropriate measures under Article VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

Fourthly, Ethiopian leaders also argue that

> "the people of Ethiopia will not accept the decisions of the Boundary Commission [and that] Ethiopia will be embroiled in a political crisis and civil war if we accept the decision".

These hackneyed arguments have been used by previous Ethiopian leaders to justify their wars of aggression. The truth is that the people of Ethiopia have enjoyed internal harmony only when they were at peace with Eritrea. Whenever it has been at war with Eritrea, Ethiopia has become a source of instability in the region, and its people the victims of recurrent famines and pestilence. Also, such declarations must ring an alarm bell, because they are similar, if not identical, to statements made by those leaders who embroiled Europe in the Second World War.

In our view, Ethiopia's leaders have assumed their lawlessness and aggressive invasion policy because they have been emboldened by past patterns of unjustifiable tolerance by the international community. No action was taken against Ethiopia when it violated the moratorium on air strikes brokered by the United States and launched its second offensive in February 1999. No action was taken against Ethiopia when, in violation of the technical arrangements forged by the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and considered final and binding, it launched its third offensive in May 2000. Ethiopia has now reached the apex of its record of lawlessness, contempt for the rule of law, treaty obligations and the Charter of the United Nations by rejecting the final and binding decision of an Arbitration Commission. How long will this culture of impunity continue? When is the world going to say, "Enough is enough" and invoke article 14 of the Algiers Agreement?

Article 14 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement states clearly, inter alia, that

> "OAU and the United Nations commit themselves to guarantee the respect for this commitment of the two parties until the determination of the common border on the basis of pertinent colonial treaties and applicable international law ... This guarantee shall be comprised of:
>
> "(a) Measures to be taken by the international community should one or both of the parties violate this commitment, including appropriate measures to be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations by the United Nations Security Council".

Should not the United Nations and the international community now take these actions in the name of justice and the Charter of the United Nations?

The international community has already invested too much — in financial and in political terms — to help bring about a legal and peaceful resolution of the dispute. The political and financial leverage of the international community, as well as the instruments of persuasion at its disposal, are also substantial, as Ethiopia continues to receive lavish development assistance from multilateral and bilateral partners. Yet, while all the ingredients and safeguards of success are there, the danger of failure of the peace process is now distinct due to the failure of the international community to take seriously its obligations under this agreement and to take effective preventive measures. Unless appropriate action is taken now, before the situation explodes, crisis management will be too late and will not be worth the effort.

In this spirit, the Eritrean delegation appeals to the General Assembly and to the international community to take necessary and timely actions to ensure that peace and security prevail in our region.

The obligations of the international community are clear, while the measures at its disposal are expressly spelled out in the Algiers Agreement.

Despite international guarantees, Ethiopia has chosen to blatantly violate international law and its solemnly signed treaty obligations. Since 19 September, when Ethiopia wilfully crossed a red line, it has set in motion an irreversible process to scuttle altogether the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea. That is an affront not only to Eritrea but also to the international community as a whole, and in particular to the United Nations and the Security Council.

In his report (S/2003/257) to the Security Council earlier this year, Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed his concern that the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace process was "at a critical stage". The situation can now be considered explosive, paving the way — as Ethiopian leaders seem to wish — to renewed conflict, with its attendant horrific consequences, unless the international community acts promptly and decisively.

The harmful effects of Ethiopia's lawlessness will not be limited to Eritrea. They will impinge on the legitimacy and credibility of the United Nations and mock its core values, if only because they violate the hallowed injunction that States, big and small, need to

observe the basic principles of international law and the sanctity of legal agreements, and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

In conclusion, the people of Eritrea and Ethiopia have been denied peace for three decades. That has had a devastating effect on their economies. They deserve peace and development, which are now recognized as human rights. Yet such peace can be guaranteed only by respect for the rule of law, the sanctity of agreements and the sovereignty and territorial integrity established by arbitration decisions made on the basis of legal agreements. Eritrea has always been, and will continue to be, committed to such peace. It is now up to the international community, and in particular the Security Council, to uphold those principles and values. In essence, Ethiopia is no longer in conflict with Eritrea, but with the Charter, which the Security Council must uphold as it has done in several similar cases.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mamadou Bamba, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bamba (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I have the great honour of conveying to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session the greetings of the people of Côte d'Ivoire, President Laurent Gbagbo, Prime Minister Seydou Elimane Diarra and the Government.

The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire has the pleasure of warmly congratulating the President of the General Assembly on his election. We wish him every success as he carries out the lofty and important tasks entrusted to him by the Member States of the Organization. His election is a testament to the international community's recognition of the vibrancy and diplomacy of Saint Lucia — the President's very beautiful country — in working for the ideals of the United Nations. His election is also a tribute to his skills as a diplomat, and an illustration of the fact that all countries are treated equally at the United Nations, which I welcome and I assure the President of the cooperation of my delegation.

I am also pleased to convey the gratitude of the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire to Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for the skill and mastery with which he guided the Assembly's work.

I take this opportunity to once again express to the Secretary-General, the United Nations and the bereaved families the sincere condolences of the people of Côte d'Ivoire on the tragic death of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, other United Nations staff members and all other persons killed or wounded in the fight for peace and justice.

I also take this opportunity to reaffirm the appreciation of the people and Government of Côte d'Ivoire for the work of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who works tirelessly for peace in the world and in Africa and who makes every effort to lend his personal support, as well as that of the Organization, to the restoration of peace in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire was once a model of stability and a haven of peace that enjoyed relative economic prosperity. However, for almost a decade it experienced a hidden crisis that led to the coup d'état of 24 December 1999, followed on 19 September 2002 by another attempted coup d'état that quickly became an armed rebellion. It was backed by foreign elements whose aim was to undermine our republican institutions and the democratically elected Government. That crisis did enormous harm to the population of Côte d'Ivoire and to all who had chosen to live in our country and to freely carry out their activities there.

A round table, held upon the initiative of France, brought together the various political forces of Côte d'Ivoire, leading to what is now known as the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. The Agreement — to which the United Nations gave formal international recognition through Security Council resolution 1464 (2003), after it had been endorsed by heads of State and leaders of international institutions meeting at the Kléber conference centre in Paris — provides for, among other things, the establishment of a Government of national reconciliation headed by a consensus Prime Minister with the necessary executive powers to implement the Agreement.

The Government of National Reconciliation, established on 13 March 2003, has made significant progress, including the 3 May 2003 signing of a comprehensive ceasefire agreement between the Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) and the Forces nouvelles — the former armed rebellion; the establishment of a consensus national disarmament,

demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme; the normalization of relations between Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbours, including the reopening of rail service from Abidjan to Ouagadougou; the 4 July 2003 joint declaration by the two parties of an end to hostilities; and, above all, the passing of an amnesty law on 6 August 2003. It should be pointed out that that law does not provide amnesty for common crimes and offences, including crimes related to violations of human rights, which must be investigated.

With regard to human rights, Côte d'Ivoire, despite the severe crisis it is experiencing, has constantly placed respect for the human person at the centre of its concerns. In addition, despite its meagre financial capacity, it has been tireless in pursuing its original policy of welcoming refugees, whose numbers have increased due to the crisis in neighbouring Liberia. Increased financial support from the international community is needed to share that heavy burden. My country must simultaneously guarantee the repatriation of the many Ivorian refugees in a number of neighbouring countries.

Here, I am pleased to mention that Côte d'Ivoire has ratified all instruments relative to the protection and promotion of human rights and, on 5 August 2002 — even before the crisis had occurred — created a Ministry devoted exclusively to human rights. Moreover, in view of massive human rights violations, Côte d'Ivoire formally requested on 5 November 2002 that an impartial United Nations fact-finding mission be sent to verify such violations throughout its territory in order to combat impunity.

Thus, after having at the same time consulted the African Commission on Human and People's Rights — whose first high-level fact-finding mission had already visited Côte d'Ivoire in April 2003, following the United Nations mission dispatched by the Secretary-General at the request of the President of the Republic — Côte d'Ivoire, in order to demonstrate its full cooperation with the various mechanisms of the Commission on Human and People's Rights, hastened to ensure positive follow-up with proposed dates for visits by the following: the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and by the Special Rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights on Contemporary Forms of Racism and Racial Discrimination; on Xenophobia and Related Intolerance; on the Right to Freedom of Opinion; on the Human Rights of Migrants; and, recently, on the Use of Mercenaries. The fact that it is temporarily impossible for our Administration and for the Special Rapporteurs to travel throughout the territory to verify the facts — together with the cries of distress of the people in those areas — is a challenge to the international community. I must commend the international community's firm commitment and immense efforts to extricate Côte d'Ivoire from this crisis.

Coming back to the progress achieved on the path to peace, I am pleased to note the 12 September 2003 appointment, after long and difficult negotiations, of the Ministers of Defence and of Security, which paves the way for implementation of the national programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) established by the Government of National Reconciliation. To that end, a disarmament committee and another committee responsible for reunification have been established. In those ways, the Government intends to show its resolve to work for a return to peace.

However, despite such encouraging results, we must acknowledge that the path of peace is fraught with pitfalls. The current difficulties prove that the process of peace and national reconciliation remains fragile. Still, the inter-Ivorian dialogue is continuing, and all of the forces recognize that the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement is the only solution providing a way out of the Ivorian crisis.

In that connection, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the firm commitment of the United States to Liberia in supporting the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to help that fraternal country exorcise the demons of war and division. In Côte d'Ivoire, as in Liberia, the DDR programme remains of paramount importance to that end. Indeed, the Government attaches particular importance to the DDR programme, which, by re-establishing security and restoring territorial integrity, will enable Côte d'Ivoire to organize transparent and fair elections in 2005, under international supervision.

On behalf of the Ivorian Government, I should like to take advantage of this rostrum once again to thank the international community — particularly the heads of State of the ECOWAS countries and the President and the Government of France — for its unwavering support for the peace effort in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the international situation and the problems afflicting it, including the current pandemics of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; armed conflicts; disarmament; terrorism; and comprehensive human development. Indeed, we note that, although HIV/AIDS affects 20 million people in Africa — two thirds of those infected worldwide — malaria continues to have at least an equal effect on the continent's mortality rate. To make matters even worse, tuberculosis is showing signs of a disturbing resurgence.

The establishment of the United Nations Global Fund to fight these three pandemics — amounting to $10.4 million — therefore provides genuine grounds for encouragement and hope for affected populations, particularly in countries of the third world. However, we hope that the Fund's endowment will increase and that it will swiftly become operational and more easily accessible to countries that are already hard hit by these scourges and that — ironically enough — are also the chief theatres of armed conflicts.

It is paradoxical to note that such conflicts are increasing in number, frequency and intensity — particularly in Africa — even as the modes and modalities for their management by the United Nations and by regional and subregional organizations are being strengthened, diversified and improved. Côte d'Ivoire therefore congratulates the Organization and its dedicated Secretary-General, as well as regional countries and organizations, on the results already achieved in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and the Great Lakes region, to cite just the most recent cases. Those results encourage all the parties concerned to persevere in the effort to re-establish and consolidate peace in all these war-torn areas.

Concerning the situations in Iraq and in Afghanistan, my country hopes for a swift return to peace and security so that their respective peoples — who have suffered much over the past decade — will be able to devote their efforts to economic and social progress.

In the Middle East, Côte d'Ivoire appeals for moderation on both sides and for compliance with the road map, which is the way back to peace in that part of the world.

In any event, law must always prevail over violence, and dialogue — under the aegis of the international community — must always be the favoured tool for resolving disputes.

Conflicts are the work of, inter alia, armed gangs, the unemployed, the marginalized and deserters who feed the flourishing market for mercenaries in Africa in general and in our subregion in particular. Mercenarism, together with the proliferation of and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, is a dangerous threat to the peace and stability of our countries. Those scourges — along with terrorism, which sadly continues to claim its victims — demand special attention from the international community.

The Assembly must undertake concrete measures in the fight against these destabilizing factors in the world, particularly in Africa. The implementation of the Programme of Action of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects — whose review last July revealed an increasing universal awareness of the danger of proliferation and the need to take coordinated actions to control it — will be an important step forward if we have the necessary political will. The measures undertaken at the regional and subregional levels — particularly the ECOWAS Moratorium and the assistance provided by the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development in Africa and by other entities — are elements leading in the right direction.

Likewise, the Assembly should activate and give fresh impetus to regional and international convention and encourage the standardization of legislation to effectively fight the phenomenon of mercenarism. Côte d'Ivoire endorses the proposal to draw up and establish — within the framework of ECOWAS — a general plan for stabilization in the subregion, which, I am convinced, would contribute to a return to lasting peace and stability in West Africa.

Preventive action must also be taken at several levels. At the political and diplomatic level, the international community should devote greater attention to preventive diplomacy, because it is essential that the outbreak of conflict be prevented through an early-warning system. At the economic and social level, the fight against poverty must be continued, particularly by integrating the unemployed and other marginalized people into economic structures.

At the cultural level, education for peace, expanding sporting and cultural exchanges, meetings among groups of women and young people, at the level of each State and among the various countries, can promote tolerance and mutual understanding among peoples in the context of a dialogue among civilizations.

The globalization of the economy may be a factor for progress by favouring competitiveness, bringing to the market the best products at the most competitive prices. Sadly, such globalization could also impede the development of poor countries, which suffer from fluctuations in the price of their products on the international market and, moreover, must cope with unfair competition imposed by States that subsidize their export items.

Given these mixed results, the recent Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in Cancún helped to gauge the magnitude of the ruinous consequences for African farmers of the subsidies given to producers in the North. By breaking the rules of free competition, the industrialized countries have enabled the richest producers to thrive while impoverishing those that are struggling for survival. This dire situation should cause us to examine our conscience so that together we may seek ways and means to redress this injustice.

There is also an urgent need to take action to stabilize commodity prices at a profitable rate.

If poor countries are to escape the vicious circle of poverty, there must be fair remuneration for the work of their farmers, complemented by an increase in official development assistance, which should reach 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of industrialized countries, and by debt cancellation.

Let us take the opportunity of the present session to reflect together on ways to strengthen North-South cooperation in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. In the framework of South-South cooperation, the most advanced countries should plan to increase trade and technology transfers to benefit less advantaged countries, in support of their own efforts.

We are concerned about the coordinated follow-up to the outcome of the major international conferences held under United Nations auspices. The fight against poverty cannot be won unless the recommendations adopted in the framework of those summits are implemented. It is no good expanding the forums for discussion if the conclusions concerning financing for development or technology transfer, in particular, cannot be implemented and used on the ground in a new spirit of genuine solidarity.

My country, Côte d'Ivoire, fervently wishes to see the advent of the new spirit of solidarity called for by globalization and the interdependence of our States, and also supports reform of the United Nations to make it democratic and efficient.

May we all have the wisdom to ensure that our resources and intelligence are put to the service of the building of a better world, where peace, solidarity and justice reign — a world that reflects the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fernand Poukré-Kono, Chairman of the delegation of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Poukré-Kono (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I pay sincere tribute to the President on his election to preside over the Assembly at the fifty-eighth session, which is being held in a particularly important context in this century. His long experience and his expertise on international issues, as well as the role that his country, Saint Lucia, plays in the Caribbean region, guarantee that our work will be a success.

I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau, and cannot fail to commend the skill with which the President's distinguished predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, of the Czech Republic, conducted the work of the fifty-seventh session.

I reiterate to the Secretary-General the full support of the Transitional Government of the Central African Republic for his unceasing work at the head of the Organization to ensure peace and security in a world beset by terrorist threats and widespread insecurity.

The Central African Republic joins those who have honoured the memory of the United Nations personnel who fell victim to the wanton violent act of terrorism in Baghdad on 19 August, including Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and reiterates its sincere sympathy to the Secretary-General. We appreciate his decision to maintain the United Nations mission in Iraq, despite everything.

For a decade, the General Assembly has adopted many recommendations, whose implementation has not always brought solutions to our diverse shared concerns.

Before my delegation contributes its appraisal of the state of the world, against the backdrop of the many challenges of the twenty-first century, I would like, on behalf of His Excellency François Bozizé, President of the Central African Republic, and of the Republic's Government and people, to express the wish that our meetings may be crowned with success.

A world that cherishes peace, progress, solidarity and concord is the objective to which the entire world aspires and the main philosophy of the founding fathers of the United Nations. Indeed, when peace is not assured, various crises ensue. Aggravating factors like destitution, penury, extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, combined with intolerance, injustice, indifference and social inequality, greatly threaten the balance of peace in many regimes of the world, and particularly in the Central African Republic.

It was against this background that a surge in patriotism occurred on 15 March this year in the Central African Republic as the outcome of a process to which all the leading lights of the nation contributed. The situation that prevailed in my country before 15 March was the subject of several debates, and unsuccessful attempts at settlement, by the Security Council, the African Union's/Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CAEMC) and the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States. A number of bilateral initiatives also failed.

I reiterate once again the gratitude of the Government and people of the Central African Republic to the Secretary-General, the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic, the Security Council members and particularly friendly countries, who generously contributed to supporting the Central African people at an extremely difficult time.

Since 15 March the resolve of the Transitional Government to work for a return to normal constitutional life has resulted in significant advances, in the framework of the implementation of commitments according to the following timetable: May 2003, establishment of the National Transition Council to replace Parliament;. September 2003, the holding of a national dialogue for the Central Africans to examine the deep causes of their long-standing confrontations; 2004, holding of a constitutional referendum; the third quarter of 2004, presidential elections; and fourth quarter of 2004, municipal and legislative elections.

This consensual transition, scheduled to end in January 2005, should establish security throughout the country, improve public finances and revive the economic and social sectors, which are engines of growth.

These main points of our overall policy and of the Transitional Government's economic and social recovery strategy now being implemented are supported and commended by the neighbouring countries in general, and in particular by the members of CAEMAC, which acknowledge the work of the new regime.

The member countries of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, at their nineteenth ministerial meeting, held in Brazzaville from 14 to 17 May this year, expressed their support for the change that had occurred in Bangui in a declaration, and appealed to the international community to provide assistance to the Central African Republic.

The exhaustive report of the situation before 15 March presented by the President of the Republic, His Excellency General François Bozizé, to the special summit of CAEMAC devoted exclusively to the situation in the Central African Republic led heads of State and of delegations to understand and support the Transitional Government's efforts to bring about a return to constitutional order. Clear signs of the significant progress in establishing national reconciliation and restoring constitutional and democratic order are the fruitful discussions with many friendly countries and partners, the consultations between the Central African Republic and the European Union which have been going on since 22 May, and the fact-finding visit to Bangui from 17 to 21 August of the Committee of Ambassadors of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States.

In his introductory report to the Millennium Summit, the Secretary-General recalled that people are the purpose of any activity. Nothing could be more true. My delegation would like to see the United

Nations regain its authority in order to help promote human rights, democracy and development throughout the world.

Protecting and guaranteeing human rights contributes to a country's national concord and to the strengthening of its democracy. This was so well understood by the Central African Republic that on 15 March we chose consensual governance, at the centre of which the well-being of the citizens and the protection and guarantee of their rights are the highest priorities.

Implementing this will require resources that permit the widespread promotion of human rights and social development. My delegation hopes that the United Nations will become more involved, at the beginning of this third millennium, in international action to create a true human rights culture. To do this, the United Nations needs to reform, renew itself and adapt to today's world. It will have to rationalize its procedures, methods and approaches to all questions within its purview.

It will be understood that my delegation would like to see the Security Council reformed, so that it may better discharge its noble mission. Even if the veto is not as abused as it was during the cold war, Security Council membership needs to be reformulated, both at the level of permanent membership and non-permanent membership, in order to reflect the new realities of our world. This is the view of the delegation of the Central African Republic.

The need for a new approach in relations between States means that we all need to make a real commitment. This led to the adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union as an expression of the desire of Africa to meet, together with the United Nations, all the challenges of the twenty-first century. My country will spare no effort to promote this new dynamism.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Klára Novotná, Chairperson of the Slovak Republic.

Ms. Novotná (Slovakia): I have the honour of addressing the General Assembly on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Eduard Kukan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Slovakia as a European Union acceding country fully endorses the statement made by the Prime Minister of Italy on behalf of the European Union. The positions and ideas expressed in Mr. Berlusconi's address perfectly reflect the values of the Government and people of Slovakia. I will therefore concentrate only on the topics that we consider the most important.

At the outset, I warmly congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency and wish him every success in discharging his important duties. He can rely on Slovakia's support and cooperation. Let me also add the voice of my delegation to those who have thanked his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his contribution to the work of this body.

Amongst the most challenging issues before us, the one that has drawn the closest attention of the world community is the situation in Iraq. We should join our efforts to help the Iraqi people reconstruct their country and build a democratic society, which is the best course of action for stabilizing the situation, which is still volatile on the ground.

The unprecedented tragedy of the destruction of the United Nations Baghdad headquarters, which ripped from our midst many brave United Nations personnel, including Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, to whom we again pay our undivided tribute, has shown us that no target is safe. Uniting to help Iraq has become a matter of common interest.

Security Council resolution 1483 (2003) laid the important framework enabling the international community to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction. At the time of its adoption, Slovakia decided to participate in stabilization operations in Iraq by sending mine-clearing experts. Although this was only a token contribution, given our capacity and the number of Slovak troops already deployed in active peacekeeping missions around the globe, I believe that it showed our commitment to creating conditions in which the Iraqi people can build their own future. As more troops are needed on the ground, we support the efforts to win greater participation from willing countries. The United Nations, with a specific mandate, must play a greater role in the Iraqi post-war restoration.

Iraq must show that a free and democratic country is the inevitable replacement for dictatorship. A democratic and prosperous Iraq is important to peace and security in the Middle East, which directly affects the rest of the world.

The difficult economic and social situation in Afghanistan, where people continue to strive to build a democratic and viable society, still leaves room for a resurgence of extremists. The international community cannot move away from Afghanistan. It must stay committed and continue to provide the necessary assistance to the Afghan people. I am pleased to announce that last July the Slovak Parliament decided to extend the participation of Slovakia in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Ten years after Israelis and Palestinians astounded the world by signing the Oslo Accords, the two sides are again locked in a cycle of violence, attacks, counter-attacks and revenge. It is unfortunate that the latest wave of violence has come at a time when the road map had started to encourage feelings of hope.

Slovakia is deeply concerned over the deteriorating situation. Recent tragic and violent events have caused enormous suffering and resulted in many innocent victims. In the face of the current situation, both sides must act responsibly, with the utmost restraint, and consider carefully the tremendously negative consequences of a complete breakdown of the peace process. The only realistic way out of the impasse is the creation of a viable Palestinian State existing alongside Israel, with the security and survival of each guaranteed. Every effort has to be made to keep the road map on the table, because there is no other alternative. Both sides must fully and without further delay implement their obligations in accordance with the road map. Slovakia reiterates its support for the road map and sees the role of the Quartet in the peace process as irreplaceable and essential.

We will not relax our efforts in the fight against global terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Underestimation of this peril could have a fateful impact on the international community. The United Nations must continue to play a decisive role in this fight. The Slovak Republic appreciates and fully supports the activities of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. Slovakia, as a party to all 12 global international conventions against terrorism, has successfully implemented their provisions into its legislation.

As a party to various international conventions and treaties, Slovakia supports joint efforts to adopt global international legal instruments and standards concerning the principle of the rule of law. The ratification process of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is well under way in the Slovak Republic and should be completed by the end of this year.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed exponential growth in peacekeeping activities in an increasing number of conflicts throughout the globe. The recent comprehensive reform has significantly improved the effectiveness of planning and management of the ever more complex and challenging United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, the most important factor for the success of United Nations peacekeeping is still the political will of Member States and their readiness to contribute contingents and equipment. In order to support and sustain the increasing number of peacekeeping operations, the timely payment of financial contributions is necessary.

Slovakia has been among the leading contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations since it became a Member of the United Nations in 1993. Our peacekeepers are currently serving in six United Nations missions in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Given our clear understanding of the new threats to our security and a willingness and ability to help tackle them, our engagement in peace support operations around the world will expand even more when we join the European Union and NATO next year. Slovakia's active involvement in peacekeeping operations confirms the fact that the maintenance of international peace is among the priorities of our foreign policy.

In recent years attacks on humanitarian workers and on United Nations personnel have increased alarmingly. We therefore welcome the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1502 (2003) on the protection of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel in conflict zones. It emphasizes the obligation of each Member State to take every step in its power to protect those working under the blue flag and to bring to justice those who attack or harm them. Slovakia has been a party to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel since 1996, and we invite those States that have not yet done so to become parties to this very important international legal instrument, which provides for the protection of United Nations and associated personnel.

One of the most important steps towards achieving international justice and putting an end to impunity for the most serious violations of human rights, war crimes and genocide was the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Slovakia, which is a State party to its Rome Statute, is firmly committed to ensuring that the Court is an independent, fair and effective institution. The election of 18 judges and of the Prosecutor and Deputy Prosecutor was essential for the successful start of its work. We are convinced that their expertise and moral integrity will ensure the highest standards in their performance and will guarantee fair and impartial justice.

Slovakia views arms control as a pivotal instrument of security policy. Here I would like to reiterate our continued support for the further strengthening of major international disarmament and non-proliferation instruments such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It would be most appropriate to reinforce this cornerstone of nuclear non-proliferation by speedily bringing into force another significant instrument — the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) — hence my delegation's repeated call on those that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the CTBT as soon as possible.

Slovakia also encourages those countries that have not signed or ratified the Ottawa Convention to do so quickly. The terror that landmines cause, despite their limited military utility, continues to spread, along with the appalling humanitarian consequences of their use in actual conflicts.

With its entry into the European Union, Slovakia is taking on moral responsibility for the poorer countries of the world. Just as Slovakia received aid in the past, it is now in duty bound to help reduce social tensions and poverty in other parts of the world. That is our contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Slovakia is systematically and consistently preparing its compact and efficient development agenda. The Slovak Government has recently adopted a legal framework and strategy for development assistance. An important step in the development of official assistance was the approval of the first annual budget in December 2002.

The current modest level of official development assistance reflects the potential of our growing economy, and we are convinced that the effective and efficient use, and sustained growth, of such official development assistance will place Slovakia more firmly within the group of new emerging donors.

We endorse the appeals made for the strengthening of the role of the United Nations and for improving the efficiency and working methods of its major organs. First and foremost, a comprehensive reform of the Security Council and a revitalization of the General Assembly is needed.

In the past year, the international community has had to deal with events whose significance have put to the test the principles that have governed international relations since the signing of the United Nations Charter. Though it is undisputed that the validity of these principles remains undiminished, we cannot shy away from seeking answers and solutions to the fundamental global challenges that we face today, including extreme poverty, drug smuggling, the spread of deadly diseases and global climate change. Finding appropriate solutions to these and other issues requires multilateral cooperation, with a viable United Nations at its core. We all wish to see a strong and decisive United Nations that is capable of effectively responding to current and future challenges. Slovakia remains committed to multilateralism and to its fundamental institutions.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Claude Morel, Chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Seychelles.

Mr. Morel (Seychelles): My delegation is proud and honoured to see Mr. Julian Hunte, a fellow islander, also from one of the smallest nations of the world, presiding over the deliberations of this body. We are well aware of his skills, experience and competence, and we are confident that he will lead our work to a successful outcome. Let me also pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his excellent work during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Our appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedicated and steadfast leadership of the United Nations during these trying times. We commend him for his tireless efforts to make the United Nations more effective and responsive to the demands of its Members.

In recent months, some have questioned the relevance and utility of the United Nations. For

Seychelles, the United Nations remains a unique, indispensable and universal multilateral institution where global issues affecting the entire international community can be debated and addressed. We believe that, despite its shortcomings, there is no other institution that is better equipped and better suited to meet the diverse demands for justice, peace, security, development and international cooperation or to ensure that the voices of its Members are heard, irrespective of their size or economic power. We hereby reaffirm our faith in the principles and purposes of the United Nations in addressing the wide range of challenges confronting the international community in the globalized and interdependent world we are living in at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

We acknowledge the fact, however, that the United Nations system needs to be reformed and modernized. We support the ongoing initiative to revitalize the General Assembly to make it more effective and efficient. Our Assembly ought to be restored to its rightful place at the centre stage of meaningful deliberations on problems and issues common to all of its Members. We ought to strive to ensure that debate in our Assembly is translated into action. In this respect, my delegation calls for the establishment of a follow-up mechanism to monitor and implement decisions and resolutions taken by the General Assembly, as well as those of the major United Nations conferences of the past decade.

The reform process will be inadequate if the transformation of the Security Council into a democratic and representative organ, reflecting its universal character and present-day realities, is not achieved. My delegation supports an increase in both permanent and non-permanent members to include developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America. After 10 years of debate, it is imperative that we bridge positions and make progress. What is required is political will by all the parties concerned with a view to arriving at an acceptable solution.

We support the decision of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent persons on the reform question. We hope they will provide inspiration and fresh ideas for the way forward.

My delegation holds the view that development ought to be central to the renewed United Nations agenda. The reform process should focus on reinforcing the role of the United Nations system in the commitment to international cooperation for development. There should be closer collaboration and coordination between the United Nations system and the international financial institutions in elaborating novel frameworks to address development funding. The ongoing dialogue between the Economic and Social Council and the Bretton Woods institutions should be vigorously pursued.

We welcome the dialogue between the leaders of the Group of Eight and their counterparts from the developing world. Those consultations should be a platform to engage the industrialized countries of the North in fulfilling their commitments to the outcomes of the major conferences, in particular the Millennium Summit, the Doha Development Round, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Action. Our development partners should realize that the implementation of their commitments is vital if we, the developing countries, are to achieve sustainable development. Their words must, indeed, be matched with deeds. The allocation of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product for international development should be an achievable objective.

This dialogue should also provide an opportunity for us to candidly discuss issues that are of common interest and concern. Problems requiring urgent attention, such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, the root causes of terrorism, the debt burden, refugees, trade terms, trafficking in humans, climate change and environmental degradation, to name just a few, should be addressed as part and parcel of shared international responsibilities.

The situation of small island developing States will feature high on the international agenda next August when Mauritius hosts the International Meeting for the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action. It will be a timely occasion to reaffirm the special characteristics, vulnerabilities and concerns of small island developing States and to consider their prospects for sustainable development. It will be an occasion to remind the international community to pay greater attention to the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities faced by small island developing States.

The Mauritius review will present the opportunity to assess implementation progress to date and establish the appropriate framework for further partnership and

cooperation in achieving the sustainable development aspirations of small island developing States. We will need the required resources to advance implementation. We therefore appeal to our development partners for their fullest support in the review process and the implementation of the outcome of the Mauritius International Meeting.

My delegation notes with concern the breakdown of negotiations at the recent World Trade Organization ministerial conference in Cancún. Small developing countries have no capacity whatsoever to distort world trade. It is therefore imperative that their vulnerabilities and special needs be taken fully in account. Seychelles urges the international community to heed the call for special and differential treatment to be accorded to developing countries, in particular small island States, that have structural disadvantages. This is crucial to the integration of our countries into the multilateral trading system so that we can achieve our development objectives. Concessions to small, vulnerable developing economies should include the critical areas of market access and trade preferences.

The second pillar of my country's economy — tuna fisheries — faces a real threat. There will be considerable social and economic consequences for us if the preferential treatment on which the industry was built is to be abandoned. After all, the trade regime is meant to provide benefits for all, not to condemn the most fragile and vulnerable groups of the international family to marginalization and economic strangulation.

A subject of preoccupation to my delegation is the adverse impact of climate change. Studies, as well as experience, have revealed that extreme changes are taking place in the climate patterns of the Western Indian Ocean region. Over recent years my country has experienced unusual periods of drought and torrential rainfall, the latter causing floods, landslides, the destruction of agricultural crops and infrastructure and even loss of life. It is estimated the 75 per cent of the corals in our archipelago have been bleached due to an increase in sea surface temperatures.

Global warming is not an issue of our making. Small island nations like mine are not responsible for it, yet we have to bear the consequences. This growing threat calls for renewed concerted international action, as it is affecting the whole planet. All nations must take steps to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. The industrialized countries have the prime responsibility and must be the first to take action. We urge them to be accountable under the Kyoto commitments and to ratify the treaty, as this is the only appropriate multilateral framework that can address and respond to this phenomenal challenge facing all nations on earth.

Last year the General Assembly endorsed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as the framework for development for the continent. International support for the implementation of this home-grown initiative is essential. We appreciate the pledges of support by the G-8 by means of their Africa Action Plan. We hope that this will soon evolve into the realization of concrete projects and programmes.

My delegation is of the view that there should be provision in the NEPAD development agenda to take into account the peculiar problems and specificities of the eight island nations that constitute the African family.

The 19 August attack on the United Nations compound in Baghdad serves as the latest reminder to all of us of the central importance of being vigilant and prepared to combat terrorism. Seychelles reiterates its condemnation of terrorism in all its manifestations.

We are in the process of finalizing our accession to the 12 United Nations conventions and protocols on terrorism. We are actively cooperating with the Counter-Terrorism Committee in the implementation of the obligations of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001).

Complying with the obligations of this Security Council resolution is a daunting task for a very small country like mine, with extremely limited capacity to deal with the relevant requirements. We will do our share as part of our responsibility, but to succeed we need technical and financial assistance. There is also the need to ensure that the capacities of small States are enhanced through sharing of intelligence information, training of personnel, and the provision of appropriate technology and equipment, for example, to deal with and handle the new challenges we have to confront. We hope the international community will be attentive and responsive to our predicament.

The conflict in the Middle East has brought about too much suffering and destruction. My delegation supports the road map for peace and calls on all parties to the conflict to embark on genuine and substantive dialogue and negotiations in the interest of durable

peace in the region. We reaffirm our belief in the rights of the Palestinian people to their own independent State, with clearly defined borders. We welcome all efforts in facilitating the search for an enduring solution to the conflict.

As regards the situation in Iraq, my delegation hopes that full sovereignty will be restored to the Iraqis as soon as possible, and that a credible and widely accepted political road map will be drawn up and implemented. We believe that the United Nations should have a central role to play in the process.

When Assembly President Julian Hunte assumed office, he appealed for an action-orientated and proactive General Assembly. I give him the assurance that, albeit in a modest manner, he will receive the full-hearted support of the Seychelles delegation for a productive and fruitful session.

Programme of work

The Acting President: On Monday, 6 October in the morning, the General Assembly will take up, as the first item, agenda item 16 (d), Election of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations A/58/PV.22

General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

22nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Niger.

Mrs. Mindaoudou (*spoke in French*): Niger is gratified by your election, Sir, to preside over this session and through me assures you of its full support as you carry out the important mission that has been entrusted to you. We wish you every success.

I also wish to address to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, my sincere congratulations on the skill, dedication and foresight with which he guided the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

I should further like to reiterate Niger's great appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the wisdom and efficiency with which he has guided our Organization in a particularly difficult international context.

On 19 August, sadly, international terrorism struck yet another symbol: United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. The attack claimed many lives, including that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello. Niger reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of that barbaric act and reviles all terrorist acts committed anywhere in the world.

The Government of Niger welcomes our Organization's determination to provide all necessary assistance to the Iraqi people, despite all the intimidation to which it has been subject. Such determination, however, can achieve results only if the United Nations is given a key role in managing the process of rebuilding a free and democratic Iraq that is the master of its own destiny.

The maintenance of international peace and security must remain a priority objective of the United Nations. In this respect, in addition to our ongoing war against international terrorism, we must pursue our efforts to free the world from the specter of weapons of mass destruction and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In that connection, the First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects at the National, Regional and Global Levels noted that, despite progress made since the adoption of the Programme of Action, control of firearms and their use remains limited. That is why Niger firmly supports the elaboration of binding legal instruments on the marking, tracking and sale of such weapons.

For Niger, the regional approach must be given pride of place in the settlement of conflicts, since it is

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increasingly recognized that most conflicts in Africa have a subregional dimension. That is the case in particular in West Africa, where stability in the Mano River region is linked to the situation in Liberia. It is also the case in Central Africa, where stability in the Great Lakes region is linked to the situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Burundi. That is why the Government of Niger feels that the strengthening of regional peacekeeping and security capacities, the cornerstone of the collective security system, must be based on enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations.

With regard to the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, Niger believes that, despite the recent incidents, the improved relations between India and Pakistan, which opened diplomatic relations in August, provide an unprecedented opportunity that must be seized to achieve a political settlement through the organization of a referendum on the self-determination of the Kashmiri people, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In the Middle East, the vision of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, peacefully coexisting with Israel, must become a reality. In this regard, it is more urgent than ever before for the two parties to the conflict to agree to a ceasefire, comprehensive adherence to which would help relaunch the road map, which is showing signs of withering. Moreover, the eventful history of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process — a history marked by recurrent setbacks and dashed hope — requires us to acknowledge that only the presence of an international interposition force can guarantee an end to the bloody violence and create conditions for the effective implementation of agreements. Thus, Niger makes a heartfelt appeal to the United Nations, the Security Council in particular, to ensure that this question be reconsidered with all due attention and in full responsibility in the interest of world peace.

Niger is deeply dedicated to the noble ideals of the Charter and therefore strives for regional and global peace and is actively participating in efforts to achieve general and complete disarmament. In that context, my country has always subscribed to the standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to achieve full transparency in the production, sale and delivery of uranium. That position is reflected in our decade-long cooperation with all actors in the uranium sector. We allow for no ambiguity. Niger continues to be ready, as it has always been, to submit to the authority of the IAEA for any verification related to the production and sale of its uranium.

I wish to recall that, in this sphere, my country, in accordance with article III of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has accepted, in agreement with the IAEA, the monitoring and guarantee system which, when implemented in good faith as it is in Niger, offers absolutely no opportunity for the kind of clandestine transactions of which my country was so unjustly accused.

The Development Goals defined in the historic Millennium Declaration must remain an ongoing concern of the international community and guide global action aimed at the establishment of a stable and just socio-economic order involving greater sharing and solidarity. We cannot overemphasize the fact that the achievement of these Goals requires reflection in specific action of all commitments undertaken at the major international conferences and summits.

What in fact have we been seeing? The international scene continues to offer the paradoxical and somewhat ignominious image of a world of enormous wealth in which the overwhelming majority of inhabitants still lives in total destitution. Despite the commitments made and the consensus reached by Governments of the entire world on this issue, we are obliged to note that the terrible vise of poverty, ignorance and disease has only been tightened around the poor peoples of the third world in general and of Africa in particular. When we know, for example, that, six years after the World Food Summit, 815 million people throughout the world continue to suffer from hunger and 150 million children suffer from malnutrition deficiencies, we can readily gauge the feeble support of donors for anti-poverty strategies, despite the lofty statements of intention that are occasionally mouthed.

Today more than ever, the situation should pull at the conscience of the international community and inspire us to greater solidarity and determination to fulfil our commitments. It is time to understand once and for all that the reduction of poverty is more than a moral imperative; it is in fact a secure investment in the promotion of a world of peace, prosperity and social progress.

It is encouraging to note that, in recent years, Africa has been at the core of major international conferences. From the Brussels Conference on the Least Developed Countries to the Johannesburg Summit, as well as the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development, the World Economic Forum, the Evian G-8 summit and the World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference in Cancún, to name but a few, Africa has been at the heart of the debates.

It should be noted that, while these meetings had the merit of having been convened, unfortunately they did not respond to the urgent and enormous expectations of the continent. In this regard, there is a need to ensure consistency in global economic governance through the strengthening of cooperation among the international organizations and of the compatibility of their decisions. It is only thus that the excessive marginalization of Africa can be alleviated, because this is the appropriate way to bring the promises of increased official development assistance to fruition. Similarly, it is important to increase the flow of direct foreign investment into Africa.

Furthermore, given the limited results achieved by current debt-alleviation programmes — the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative in particular — we must now recognize that the ultimate solution lies in the outright cancellation of the debt, the servicing of which is consuming the greater part of the budgets of African countries and fuelling capital flight. There is also a need for Africa's trade partners fully to comply with their commitments, in particular by improving the access of African products to their markets and by eliminating agricultural subsidies that create distortions in world trade.

The failure of the WTO Conference in Cancún is a good illustration of the obstinate reluctance of the rich countries to take into account the legitimate aspirations of the poor countries regarding the establishment of just and equitable standards to govern world trade. And yet, solving the critical problem of agricultural subsidies and of access to markets would have made it possible both to enhance the badly tarnished credibility of the WTO and to provide a measure of consistency to the declarations of intention made by the countries of the North. Above all and unquestionably, it would have contributed to raising millions of people out of poverty. This lack of agreement means that the cotton workers of West Africa, among others, can no longer live from their labour and may be excluded from international trade, to the benefit of more competitive producers who are being subsidized.

Cancún was a failed rendezvous of the Doha Round. WTO will certainly have to adopt a new approach and prioritize the settlement of agricultural problems, which most agree are more important than the interests of the multinationals.

The countries of Africa are fully aware of the need to develop their relationship with their development partners within the context of interdependence, cooperation and mutual responsibility. In that regard, they acknowledge the importance of judicious national policies and good governance, which they consider to be indispensable to accelerated development and, above all, to achieving the 7 per cent growth rate required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is inspired by this consensual approach, based on a new relationship of cooperation between Africa and the developed world. NEPAD, a symbol of Africa's resolve to take its own destiny in hand, is the foundation on which the African Union will rely to promote the growth and sustainable development of African countries, individually and collectively.

While we call for a massive flow of investments and the growth of official development assistance to contribute to our development efforts, we, too, must comply with our commitments in terms of mutual responsibility. That is why my country, Niger, firmly supports the implementation of the NEPAD Peer Review Mechanism. The Mechanism will play a key role in the continent's prospects as an instrument for building strong States dedicated to good governance and sustainable development.

In drawing up through a participatory approach a national strategy for poverty reduction, the Government of Niger intends to become deeply involved in the dynamic process of establishing strong, stable and competitive economies in accordance with the objectives of the NEPAD Programme of Action. The strategy document serves simultaneously as a reference framework for poverty reduction policies and programmes and as an instrument to mobilize financial resources. We are convinced that the implementation of the poverty-reduction strategy will contribute to

improving the dialogue of policies, to further strengthening donor coordination and intervention, and to developing a multidimensional strategic partnership to translate into action the deepest hopes of the people of Niger.

From this rostrum, I solemnly reaffirm the deep gratitude of the Government of Niger to those international partners which, at the poverty-reduction forum held last June in Niamey, proved their full adherence to the strategy and their commitment to supporting its implementation.

In recent years, the world has undergone rapid and profound changes. These require us to adapt our Organization's functions to today's reality in order to better to take into account the new challenges and legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the planet and not the specific interests of a tiny group of countries, no matter how powerful. That is why Niger firmly supports the courageous reforms proposed by the Secretary-General to strengthen and improve the functioning of the Organization and to allow it effectively to cope with the challenges of our times. The long-awaited democratization of the Security Council must be accompanied by a strengthening of the role of the General Assembly, the highest representative body, and of the Economic and Social Council, the guarantor of the advent of a new economic and social order.

The United Nations is at a decisive juncture and must urgently regain the confidence of States and of world public opinion, which has been sorely tested by recent events. It is up to all of us to strive resolutely to that end, because, as the Secretary-General has said, we are the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Maria Levens, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Suriname.

Mrs. Levens (Suriname): On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Suriname, I would at the outset like to take this opportunity to extend to you, Sir, a fellow brother of the Caribbean, and to the other members of the Bureau my sincere congratulations on your unanimous election to guide the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

Suriname shares in the satisfaction experienced by the Caribbean region. We are convinced that, given your vast diplomatic experience and skills, you will be able to guide the affairs of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly in a most effective manner. In this regard, I can assure you that Suriname will support you in every possible way.

My delegation would also like to express its gratitude to Mr. Jan Kavan, the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for the manner in which he chaired the affairs of this organ. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

Likewise, my Government would like to reiterate its support for Secretary-General Kofi Annan. His dedication to the goals and spirit of the Organization has been exemplary and has served him well in protecting the interests of humanity.

My Government strongly deplores the atrocious terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Our thoughts are with the Secretary-General and with the bereaved families of those who perished as a result of the incident. We especially mourn the demise of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a dedicated United Nations staff member who laboured for the benefit of many troubled societies.

The opportunities that arise from developments in the world today are, unfortunately, not within reach of all the world's children. This world order, which is well-developed on the one side, copes with serious development setbacks in the economic and social sectors on the other. Economic downfalls, declining health services and the persistence of an international non-supportive environment are all circumstances that affect the ability of Governments, in particular in the developing countries, to adequately implement policies that are required. There exists a wider disparity between the haves and the have-nots, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of opportunities offered by the rapid development in the digital sector. Globalization can become an avenue to global development only if it becomes all-inclusive and assumes a human face.

This idea was behind the sense of urgency and understanding that participants in the global consultative process for development cooperation brought to the meetings in Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg. These meetings generated the needed political commitment and momentum, as did the Millennium Summit, at the highest political level. We must maintain this momentum and continue to

demonstrate the political will and energy to implement the decisions carefully drafted at these meetings.

To accelerate progress towards these goals, there is a need for a set of policies that generate stronger economic growth, complemented by action to enhance the capabilities of poor people to participate in growth and to access key social services. As agreed in Doha and in Monterrey, these efforts should enjoy stronger support from the international community, in particular through increased market access for developing countries.

My Government also holds the view that it is necessary for all relevant actors to continue to be involved in the process that should lead to the coordinated and integrated implementation of the outcomes of these meetings. Such an approach should put us on a path of economic and social development that reduces poverty and works for all the world's peoples.

International peace and security predominantly occupy the international agenda. The maintenance of international peace and security is a major concern of the international community, as declining security affects the protection of human rights and the very existence of all human beings. It is therefore important that global security be based on a secured and just framework that promotes the peaceful coexistence of all States. The Government of Suriname is of the considered view that the United Nations and its Charter offer the best guarantee for the maintenance of international peace and security. Abidance by the security framework laid down in the Charter is therefore of utmost importance.

Declining security affects every member of the international community. It is therefore essential to increase the involvement of the general membership of the Organization in the agenda and work of the Security Council, while an increase in the membership of the Council should reflect the international political and economic realities and security needs of contemporary global society.

The principle of human-centred security might offer the best possible and most effective road to travel in order to meet the security needs of today's world. A commitment to human-centred security will generate more integrated international cooperation in many related fields, from conflict prevention to disarmament, including respect for the rule of law and for human rights.

The United Nations must continue to be innovative in its search for effective ways and means to increase global security. We must continue to argue for more tolerance and understanding among peoples. Suriname is one of the most ethnically varied nations in the world, where people of different religions and racial backgrounds live and work peacefully together, and with a Government and Parliament in which Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews form one front to collectively work on the development of our country.

The dialogue among civilizations, in particular among religions, must be encouraged. We must furthermore seek to remove those circumstances that give rise to situations that foster global insecurity. This task must be given a central place in any overall strategy to increase international peace and security. Maintaining international peace and security must increasingly become a common responsibility involving all actors, Governments and peoples alike. The restructuring of the United Nations must also result in achieving a more effective General Assembly.

It is important that the General Assembly be perceived by the general public as an important international body contributing to its development and prosperity. A restructured General Assembly, as the sole universal deliberative body, must continue to spearhead the debate on development, but must also incorporate into its agenda other issues of a global nature that are of special importance to humanity.

The common task ahead is to collectively work towards sustainable human development and to create a global society in which equity, equality and equal rights and opportunities exist for all human beings and extreme poverty can be eradicated. Achieving such a global society requires the involvement, determination and commitment of every Government, civil society and business sector, as well as coordinated and comprehensive actions by all these actors in the global fight against poverty and injustice.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lewis Brown, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): I am honoured to participate, on behalf of Mr. Moses Zeh Blah, President of the Republic of Liberia, in the general debate of the

General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, and to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I express the confidence of the Government of Liberia that you will faithfully honour the responsibilities which you have been assigned.

I also wish to commend Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic for the able manner in which he steered the activities of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Kofi Annan deserves the commendation of this Assembly for his stewardship of our global Organization and the excellent leadership which he exudes in the resolution of international questions, ranging from terrorism to the deadly AIDS pandemic and from poverty to the imbalance in global trade and commerce.

We must also pay a special tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello and other United Nations workers who lost their lives in selfless humanitarian service in Iraq. Those citizens of the world embodied the spirit of the United Nations and are true representatives of the conscience of humanity.

Terrorism, the menace to international peace and security, has brought immeasurable grief to the world. Acts of terrorism have elicited neither the understanding nor the empathy of the world for causes to which terrorists may aspire. Contrarily, acts of terrorism have rightly ignited widespread disdain and revulsion for their perpetrators. Today, terrorism seeks to undermine our collective freedom and therefore requires our collective will and efforts to combat this common enemy.

However, this objective is being undermined by the lack of international consensus. The unwillingness to garner and work along lines of international consensus has exposed cracks in our efforts to fight terrorism, bringing into scrutiny the structure of this world body and the continued relevance of the Security Council. When the Security Council appears divided on fundamental questions of international security, the world becomes vulnerable. A divided Security Council fertilizes the grounds for the germination of international terror and insecurity. If the Security Council is to serve as the guarantor of international peace and security, then that organ must of necessity be guided by mechanisms that ensure the judicious development of consensus and respect for and adherence to international law.

Additionally, our united condemnation of and fight against terrorism must never stoop to the employment of methods not far removed from those used by terrorists themselves. To fight fire with fire will leave our global village without a single hut. We must muster the will to tackle the issues that are exploited by terrorists and terrorist organizations.

The conflict in the Middle East has inescapably attracted the attention of the world, posing the greatest challenge to international peace and security. We are saddened by and deeply concerned about the recent turn of events, which has occasioned the virtual debunking of the road map for peace and ensured a classic return to violence. Admittedly, there are serious difficulties in the search for peace for our brothers and sisters of that troubled region. However, these difficulties should neither beset us with a sense of hopelessness nor obscure the agonies and the fears that have come to characterize the way of life in the Middle East.

We therefore call on the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to recognize the right to existence of each other within recognized international borders and to foster pragmatic approaches to dialogue, peace, security and the virtues of good-neighbourliness. At the same time, we urge the Security Council to develop, strengthen and maintain international consensus on the way forward.

With respect to the Liberian crisis, since our last address to this Assembly, Liberia has wrestled and continues to wrestle with serious political and security challenges. An insurgency that began four years ago reached the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Unsurprisingly, an already deteriorating humanitarian situation worsened, accompanied by the widespread breakdown of law and order. Regrettably, while recognizing the intensification of the war in Liberia and the right of the Liberian people to self-defence, the Security Council maintained an arms embargo on the Government. This situation catalysed the rapid advance of the insurgents and bestowed upon their cause a false sense of international approbation. The Liberian State teetered on the verge of disintegration.

But for the resilience of the people of Liberia and the timely intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the International

Contact Group on Liberia, Liberia would have slipped into the abyss of unbridled anarchy. We will therefore remain eternally grateful to ECOWAS, and particularly to the Governments and peoples of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Ghana, for their leadership in the quest to stabilize the situation in my country. In a similar manner, the Government of Liberia expresses immense gratitude to the Government of the United States of America, the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union for their respective roles in and continued support for the ongoing efforts to restore lasting peace, security and democracy to Liberia. We must also pay special tribute to the support of the Governments of South Africa and Mozambique.

On 11 August 2003, with the deployment of a vanguard force from the friendly Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the promise of a smooth transfer of power was remarkably fulfilled. This development energized the signing, on 18 August in Accra, Republic of Ghana, of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Agreement establishes a framework for the formation and installation of a transitional Government, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants and the restructuring of the national security apparatus. It also provides for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, the rebuilding of the nation's productive capacity and the creation of democratic space for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in 2005. These goals cannot be achieved without concerted multinational collaboration and assistance.

The Government of Liberia welcomes the adoption of Security Council resolution 1509 (2003), which establishes the United Nations Mission in Liberia. We pledge our cooperation and support to the realization of the objectives set out in the resolution. Comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and a sustained programme of reintegration and resettlement are sine qua non to peace, security and stability in Liberia and the West African subregion. The Government of Liberia is therefore beholden to the international community, with gratitude for its continuous assistance and support in the search for peace and security in Liberia and the West African subregion. However, unless democratic expressions and aspirations are allowed to flourish through strengthened democratic institutions, and unless an alternative source of livelihood is provided the disarmed combatants, the gains obtained through the support of the international community could be grievously undermined.

In this respect, resolution 1509 (2003), which engenders new hope for Liberia, appears to be contradicted by the demands of resolution 1343 (2001). That resolution imposes and maintains a regime of sanctions and other restrictions on Liberia. Unarguably, economic sanctions imposed under resolution 1343 (2001) becloud Liberia with an undeserved stigma that, in effect, discourages the flow of much-needed international investment into the private sector to support Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes and restricts the essential flow of energy needed to revive Liberia's economic infrastructure.

A vibrant private sector is the key to Liberia's recovery and the cure to problems of unemployment, which provides stimulus to social unrest and political instability. If sanctions, smart or targeted, are tools to accomplish political objectives, then they must respond affirmatively to the realization of the objectives. One does not administer medication to a dead person nor does one take medication to cure the illness of another. The Government of Liberia therefore calls on the Security Council to lift its regime of economic sanctions imposed on the country.

In situations such as ours, international goodwill and assistance are often accompanied by the temptation to ignore indigenous expertise largely in favour of expatriates. The net effect of adherence to such temptation is the development of structures and institutions that are neither manageable nor sustainable by the beneficiaries after the departure of the expatriates. Even so, Liberia is blessed with its share of endowments in human and natural resources. As can be expected, years of political turmoil, conflict and mismanagement have resulted in the massive exodus of Liberia's human resources. Welcoming a new opportunity to rebuild a more democratic, accountable and coherent society, Liberians are desperate to return home and contribute. To that end, it is the desire and expectation of the Government and people of Liberia that, as much as is possible, Liberians will be employed at all levels in the post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of their country.

Liberia is a founding Member of this world body. Irrespective of the current problems we face and our

need for international assistance, Liberia will remain a respectable member of the international community. We intend to uphold our sovereign dignity in the conduct of international affairs. Liberia cannot and will not be a subject of trusteeship.

Like most third-world nations, Liberia is deeply indebted to several international financial institutions and organizations. We are grateful to our creditors for their patience and understanding. Determined as we are to survive, we count on the empathy of the international community to treat our indebtedness with the uniqueness that it deserves and pledge our commitment to working along with those institutions in developing appropriate mechanisms to deal with Liberia's debt. Servicing these debts remains a priority for the Government of Liberia. However, our capacity to make payment is limited by manifold problems occasioned by several years of continuous warfare.

I should now like to turn to the case of the Republic of China. The General Assembly must confront the moral and legal challenges posed by the exclusion of more than 23 million people from representation in this world body. How else are we to explain the denial of the rights of a progressive and industrious people from representation at the level of the General Assembly? The fact remains that the Government and people of the Republic of China on Taiwan have, and continue to engage in, responsible self-governance. It is incontestable that the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan continue to significantly contribute to the improvement of the human family. Their achievements in the spheres of science and technology, commerce and trade, and the arts and culture cannot be ignored.

The undaunted spirit of the great people of the Republic of China aspires to participate in the United Nations. Liberia is convinced that the participation of both sides of the Taiwan Strait in the activities of international organizations will encourage greater understanding and mutual trust between the two sides. That is consistent with the spirit of preventive diplomacy advocated by the United Nations. Liberia therefore reiterates its call for the admission of the Republic of China on Taiwan to the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as the assumption of its rightful place in the discourse and transaction of world affairs.

In conclusion, Liberia is today in urgent need of international assistance and support. While our situation appears to be grim, it is certainly not hopeless. While many of our compatriots may have lost lives and limbs, we are still a forgiving people. While our national infrastructure may have been destroyed, we are still a resilient people. While our dignity may have been impinged upon, we are still a proud people. We Liberians are unified in our determination to work for a better and brighter future. We are united in fostering the faith of our founding fathers to build a nation dedicated to freedom, liberty and justice for all.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Allow me also to express our heartfelt appreciation to Mr. Jan Kavan for his outstanding leadership during the previous session. I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and the United Nations staff members who fell victim to cowardly and blind rage in Baghdad. The dreadful terrorist attack perpetrated against those messengers of peace once again highlighted the danger we face in many corners of the world.

In recent years, the United Nations and the entire world community have come up against challenges that threaten the very basis of the Organization and our collective efforts towards global peace and security. International terrorism, a threat with a global dimension, affects each and every one of us. However, it has become evident that many of the new democracies are particularly vulnerable to that threat. Scarce material resources and the lack of qualified personnel undermine their efforts, highlighting the need for further intensified global cooperation.

Georgia is no exception when it comes to threats posed by international terrorism. However, despite existing difficulties, and with the active support and assistance of our partners, especially the United States, we have made substantial progress. Georgia successfully completed its anti-criminal and anti-terrorist operation in the Pankisi Gorge. We have freed that territory from illegal armed groups and have seized a considerable number of arms and ammunition. I can unequivocally state today that the Pankisi Gorge, which

has been freed of every illegally armed person, no longer poses any threat to Georgia or its neighbours. However, unless the root cause of the Pankisi Gorge problem is settled, namely, the conflict in Chechnya, we cannot consider the problem eliminated. The lesson to be drawn from this experience is that the fight against terrorism, in all its complexity, will be successful only if carried out through concerted international efforts. A single quick-fix operation can cause the problem to resurface at a later stage.

Many of the speakers who spoke before me highlighted the importance of tackling the threat of international terrorism in all its aspects. We cannot but share that notion. Protracted problems, and in particular unresolved conflicts that result in the creation of uncontrolled territories, have become a breeding ground for terrorism. It is only a matter of time until we witness greater ties being forged between separatist leaders and terrorists.

A vivid example of that is the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. That territory, which is under the control of a separatist regime, has turned into a safe haven for criminals, traffickers in drugs and human beings, illegal arms dealers and terrorist groups. The notorious Shamil Basayev, who was recently included on the Counter-Terrorism Committee's terrorist list, has re-established himself as a friend of the separatist authorities and is maintaining active links with the terrorist groups in Abkhazia. In the near future, we will provide the Counter-Terrorism Committee with relevant information on individuals involved in terrorist activities in that region of Georgia.

The record of the United Nations in reaching a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, has been less than satisfactory. After more than 10 years of United Nations involvement, we have not come even a single step closer to a settlement. Blatant violations of human rights and ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population in Abkhazia continue unabated. Despite numerous calls, we have failed to correct even the fundamental flaws in the entire United Nations-led peace process.

We welcome the fact that, since the last session of the General Assembly, the Geneva process has gained a new dimension. We are hopeful that that will give new impetus to the peace process. I would like to stress that this relatively new development is still fragile and that it should be aimed at achieving results, and not at the process itself. We would also like to underline the importance of the recently held summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which reinforced the previous decisions of CIS heads of States putting forth restrictive regulations on political and economic cooperation and contact with Abkhazia, Georgia.

However, despite those positive steps, very little has changed on the ground. In that regard, I am thinking in particular of the illegal unilateral actions undertaken by representatives of the Russian side, and especially by leaders of regional authorities, that significantly damage the peace process. The railway link between Sochi and Sukhumi is still operating unhindered. Despite our appeals at the last session of the General Assembly, the wholesale granting of Russian citizenship to the Abkhaz population has never slowed. Russian passports issued to the inhabitants of the secessionist region have already fallen into hands of terrorists, who are making the best use of free passage in and out of Russia through the Abkhaz and Ossetian sections of the Georgian-Russian border, where our neighbour unilaterally imposes a visa-free regime.

The illegal acquisition of property — including possessions of internally displaced persons — in Abkhazia, Georgia, by State bodies, legal entities and individuals continues. Needless to say, such acts are being carried out in flagrant violation of international law and represent an infringement of Georgia's sovereignty. They run counter to the Georgian law that declares any transaction with the separatist regime null and void.

The illegal presence of the Russian military base in Gudauta is yet another element that is exacerbating the situation in Abkhazia. Georgia insists that the commitment undertaken in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe concerning the removal of that base be implemented expeditiously and transparently.

But there must still be hope — hope that we will not again fail the 300,000 internally displaced persons and refugees, whose patience is running thin. Efforts must be redoubled to persuade the Abkhaz side to accept the so-called Boden Document, on the distribution of constitutional competences between Tbilisi and Sokhumi, as a basis for political negotiations.

We have repeatedly noted the failure of the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States to provide security for returnees. In fact, those forces — which do not even have a United Nations mandate — have done no more than sustain the status quo, virtually functioning as border guards between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. We cannot hope for any improvement in the situation unless the United Nations takes upon itself the launching, in an internationalized format, of a full-scale peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia. It is through an increased role on the part of the United Nations and through the will of the international community that the unheeding Abkhaz separatists can be forced to compromise. Failing that, the Government of Georgia will have no other choice but to request the Security Council to resort to the measures envisaged under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The Secretary-General and many other world leaders have duly recognized that the United Nations is passing though one of the most critical phases of its history. New global realities have made it clear that immediate measures ought to be undertaken if we want to ensure the sustainability of the United Nations and to strengthen the confidence of Member States in the Organization.

In his statement before the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, in 1992, President Shevardnadze of Georgia stated:

> "There is no need to fear reforms when reforms are so necessary, especially, in our view, in the two interrelated fields of peacekeeping and nation-building in the newly independent States." (*A/47/PV.12, p. 36*)

Those sentiments have been duly echoed during the current Assembly session. We should be courageous enough to recognize that reform of the United Nations is essential for the interests of each of us, as well as for our collective good.

It is our belief that Member States can rally around the Secretary-General in his call for the creation of a high-level panel of eminent personalities charged with a multitude of tasks aimed at reforming the United Nations. I reaffirm Georgia's support for expansion of the Security Council. We join the calls to grant Germany and Japan permanent seats on the Council and to increase the number of non-permanent members. Moreover, the decision-making process within the Council should be made more transparent and democratic to ensure that the adoption of necessary resolutions does not fall prey to special, narrow interests.

As we continue to collectively witness changing global realities, the Government of Georgia welcomes the increasing role of regional structures in achieving the fundamental objectives set forth by the United Nations. The efforts of European and Euro-Atlantic structures in the Balkans is just one successful example in that regard. Another vivid example is Afghanistan, where NATO has taken a leading role in the peace-building operation. That organization's role will increase further as a result of its recent expansion. Security issues have become a serious concern for such regional organizations as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the GUUAM Participating States — Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Republic of Moldova. Here, we should like to appeal to Member States for support for the GUUAM's efforts to be granted observer status in the General Assembly.

The Millennium Summit and the decisions taken there remain, in our view, one of the most significant achievements of the United Nations. The consensus achieved both at the Monterrey and the Johannesburg Summits are road maps for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of Georgia supports the objectives and strategies set forth in both outcome documents, considering it imperative that the international community remain on course.

Globalization is becoming an everyday reality. Advances in modern technologies are making that process irreversible. However, it is up to the United Nations to take a more active role in guaranteeing equitable distribution of resources among all nations of the world. It is through increased cooperation, through the streamlining of actions within the United Nations and its bodies, and through the establishment of new partnerships that the Organization must prevail in achieving global sustainable development.

Despite rapidly changing global realities, one thing remains constant: there is a greater need and a greater demand for the United Nations. We remain hopeful that common sense and a common vision of the future will prevail in this unique international body. For our part, we are prepared to do our utmost towards that end.

The President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Kalombo Mwansa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia.

Mr. Mwansa (Zambia): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. My delegation pledges its support and its cooperation to you. I wish you a very successful tenure of office. I also wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for the efficient manner in which he presided over the proceedings of the previous session. In addition, I wish to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his relentless efforts and dedication to the cause of international peace, security and economic development.

My delegation wishes to express our deepest sympathies to the families of the United Nations staff who died in the terrorist bombing at the United Nations offices in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. Those tragic deaths are an incalculable loss to the United Nations. Such violent acts should not be allowed to continue. My Government also joins other Members of the United Nations in condemning these inhuman acts.

I should like to state that Zambia condemns, in all its forms and manifestations, the terrorism that is occurring in various parts of the world. We pledge to cooperate with the international community in the fight against international terrorism. It is in that vein that the Zambian Government welcomes Security Council resolution 1502 (2003), on the protection of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel in conflict zones, which was adopted on 26 August 2003 and which, inter alia, expresses strong condemnation of all forms of violence.

The tragedy in Baghdad underscores the need for concerted efforts to strengthen multilateral approaches to international peace and security. The United Nations should be allowed to lead efforts to achieve comprehensive disarmament in nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons. Terrorists should be denied access to all weapons of mass destruction.

Nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons, pose a serious threat to international peace and security. In Africa, small arms and light weapons, as well as anti-personnel landmines, have destabilized States and have taken a great toll on life and property. My Government is hopeful that this session will advance the horizon of the international disarmament agenda.

Zambia mourns the untimely death of Ms. Anna Lindh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, who dedicated her life to the pursuit of peace, social progress and development. My country will miss her friendship, dynamism and broad understanding of developmental issues.

As a peace-loving Member State, Zambia will continue to cooperate with and to support the efforts of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), established by the Security Council to fight terrorism. The CTC should be encouraged to work to raise the capacities of Member States to fight international terrorism. Emphasis should be placed on addressing linkages between terrorism, money-laundering and organized crime, which are among the most serious challenges to stability and peace in our era.

The strength of the United Nations lies in its legitimacy, founded on the bedrock of principles of international law accepted by all Member States. It is essential that the conduct of international affairs be in conformity with those principles. The common security agenda should reflect a global consensus on all major threats to peace and security. The spirit of cooperation based on the shared values of equality and sovereignty, which are enshrined in our Charter, is a source of our strength.

Poverty is the greatest impediment to development. Poverty reduction therefore remains the foremost priority of developing countries and should continue to feature highly on the agenda of the United Nations. It is regrettable that, since the Millennium Declaration three years ago, indications are that most developing countries risk falling short of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. This is largely due to lack of resources and capacity and weaknesses in national and global economies. Zambia continues to strive to implement those goals.

Globalization has brought about both opportunities and challenges. But the current world economic conditions are unfavourable to developing countries in general, and to the least developed countries in particular. Unless there is an increase in the flow of the official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment and other forms of assistance, it will be difficult for these countries to come out of the

vicious circle of poverty and lack of development. This situation is exacerbated by the huge external debts that the least developed countries are struggling to pay off.

Given their economic problems, the least developed countries, of which 34 out of 49 are in Africa, there is need for support from the international community within the framework of the 2001 Brussels Plan of Action. In that vein, I wish also to urge developed countries to honour their pledges to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product offered as ODA to developing countries.

While we welcome the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in addressing the external debt, there is a need to broaden and ease the process of accessing funds. Equally important, developing countries need easy access to the markets of the developed countries. This is important to stimulate economic growth. To level the playing field, my delegation calls for the removal of agricultural subsidies in developed countries, which have contributed to the adverse and poor terms of trade for the developing countries.

Zambia regrets the failure to achieve a consensus at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference at Cancún. There is an urgent need to overcome the impasse that emerged. Developed countries should demonstrate a give-and-take spirit in these negotiations.

In the effort to address social and economic problems and promote development, the African heads of State and Government, at their summit held in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001, adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), to place the continent on a path to sustainable growth.

Although the ownership and the implementation of the NEPAD programme is the responsibility of the Africans themselves, in order to succeed they need the cooperation and assistance of the international community. My delegation would like to appeal to the donor community, including United Nations agencies, to assist in the implementation of NEPAD.

My delegation is mindful that Africa's development is hampered by conflicts. Wherever these occur, there is no development; rather, there is more destruction and loss of life and property. Zambia commends the leadership of Africa for taking up the challenge to resolve conflicts in the African way. We thank them for their time and resources directed at that effort. We are happy to note the positive developments that have taken place in the recent past in various parts of Africa where the peace processes have led to the cessation of conflict and the return of peace.

In that regard, my Government reaffirms its readiness to contribute to the international conference on the Great Lakes region initiated by the United Nations in collaboration with the African Union.

The international community should make efforts for conflict prevention and resolution. Conflicts should be avoided by creating a conducive political environment and allow political pluralism, democracy, good governance and transparency to flourish. My country's commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts is unwavering, and we will continue to participate in peacekeeping operations.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is indeed a global crisis. It is no longer just a health concern, but an impediment to human development and political stability, which threatens international peace and security. The startling figures of 42 million people who live with HIV/AIDS globally, the majority of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa, and the 31 million people who have died from the pandemic, should compel the international community to take concrete measures to combat the scourge.

The scourge has ravaged Zambia. My Government is devoting considerable attention and resources to combat its spread and to limit its impact on our communities. We are also tackling the problems created by the pandemic such as the plight of AIDS orphans, street kids and vulnerable households. In this task, Government, civil societies, the relevant United Nations agencies and the private sector are all working together. Zambia is also cooperating with other Governments as well in tackling this pandemic.

The Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which is a welcome initiative, has provided renewed impetus to the programmes and interventions of Member States designed to combat these deadly diseases. There is a need to contribute more generously to the Fund for it to be solvent and viable. My delegation wishes to appeal for easier access to these funds to enable affected countries to procure cheaper and affordable generic drugs that are urgently needed.

My delegation calls for radical reform and strengthening the world body to make it a more efficient and effective instrument to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Zambia supports the Secretary-General's proposals for reform of the United Nations aimed at the strengthening this world body.

In conclusion, I wish to state that my delegation recognizes the numerous challenges that the United Nations faces. I have every hope, that through our collective effort, we will succeed in attaining peace, development and prosperity for all humanity. Zambia pledges her support in these efforts.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rodolphe Adada, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Francophonie of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Adada (Congo) (*spoke in French*): Three years ago, we held the Millennium Summit, during which we crafted a clear-cut common vision for the twenty-first century, a road map to confront the challenges of globalization: peace and security now facing new threats, development and international cooperation, the environment, pandemics and so forth.

One year later the first challenge to this reassuring and ambitious edifice arose, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The international community reacted unanimously and immediately adopted a collective response. A few months later we witnessed the aggravation of tensions with the Iraq crisis, which severely tested the principle of collective security and moral authority of the United Nations, to the point that we doubted the rationale for and the survival of what should be, after all, our common home.

Finally, and most recently, we have witnessed the failure of the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancún. This deadlock in defining a negotiating process to revive the Doha round places in jeopardy the growth prospects of the world economy which would otherwise benefit all people. This can also be interpreted as a new opportunity to marginalize the countries of the South.

All of this shows that this present session is being held in a particularly worrisome context. These developments are dangerous for the management of international affairs that should be marked with a spirit of dialogue, consultation and openness.

We must, therefore, return to the spirit of multilateralism that characterized the Millennium Summit. We must reaffirm, loud and clear, the role of the United Nations as a central axis of collective security and inspiration for the rules of international cooperation aimed at justice and equality.

For this reason it is important to strengthen the role of our Organization and improve its effectiveness. The Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has now presented a very edifying report in this connection and we very much encourage him to persevere along the path of reform and rationalization and to place the multilateral system at the core of the management of crises and the display of leadership in the world.

Your election, Sir, to the presidency of this session of the General Assembly is, for us, a tremendous asset. It symbolizes the sovereign equality of all States, large and small, and is a way of paying tribute to your great qualities and your diplomatic experience. We are convinced that you will know how to skilfully guide our debate on multilateralism to a satisfying outcome, very much in keeping with the high expectations of the community of nations.

This year, once again we see the challenges to peace and international security at the very core of our major preoccupations. Everyone remembers the attack of 19 August 2003 against the United Nations offices in Baghdad. The death of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and several dedicated servants of the United Nations, is still alive in our memories.

In paying tribute to their courage and dedication, we must do everything within our power to ensure that their sacrifice was not made in vain and that the cause they served so heroically does indeed triumph in the interests of the Iraqi people and the noble ideas of the United Nations.

We must therefore encourage the Security Council to return to its essential unity so that the international community, led by the moral authority of the United Nations, can help the Iraqi people to find peace, security and stability and reconstruct their country devastated by war and many years of embargo.

Not far from Iraq, the international community is still confronted with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This shows that the infernal cycle of violence can only lead to a dead end. The two parties must come to their senses and return to the vision set out in the road map, which provides for the creation of a Palestinian State that is independent, democratic and viable, living side by side with Israel and its other neighbours in an atmosphere of peace and security.

The Security Council approved this vision in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) and the two parties committed themselves to respecting the road map on 4 June 2003 at the outcome of the Aqaba Summit. We must now bring them back to the negotiating table, with no pre-conditions, and demand that they refrain from any measure or unilateral action that is incompatible with the goals of the road map.

Still on the subject of peace and security, it seems to be necessary and essential to emphasize that we must refrain from conflating terrorism, religion or civilization as belonging to any geographical area or supporting any national liberation struggle.

Just as we must be firm, demanding and united when confronting acts of unjustifiable blind violence, we must also be vigilant so as not to be tempted by convenience.

In our relentless struggle against terrorism, it is important to give appropriate responses when it comes to the sovereignty of peoples, respect for human rights, social justice and combating poverty. We must also seriously analyse the causes that serve as the breeding ground or pretext for terrorism. This is also part of conflict prevention and, to some extent, the prevention of terrorism.

This year we are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. It is regrettable to note that, since the end of the cold war, so little progress has been accomplished and today's deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament is a tragic display of our failure.

At a time when the international community is legitimately concerned about weapons of mass destruction that might fall into the hands of terrorists, it is important to remind all of the actors that they must abide by the multilateral agreements and scrupulously respect them.

Within the context of disarmament activities, we welcome the holding, last July in New York, of the first Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. My country hosted in Brazzaville, from 12 to 14 May 2003, a sub-regional seminar on the implementation in Central Africa of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and presented at that time a report reflecting Africa's firm determination to eradicate this scourge.

As part of its implementation of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines, from 9 to 10 September 2003, Congo destroyed its stock of landmines. During two public operations carried out with the support of Canada and the United Nations, our Government destroyed 5,220 landmines. We intend to continue with an operation to search out landmines in the southern part of our country that borders on Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This is to illustrate the degree of cooperation that prevails among the countries of Central Africa when it comes to questions of peace and security.

Africa is seen today as the focal point for the challenges confronting humanity, in particular as regards armed conflict, underdevelopment and the proliferation of pandemics. But this is not all that Africa has to offer the rest of the world. Various courageous initiatives now show Africa's determination to take its fate into its own hands: the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Peer Review Mechanism and the Council for Peace and Security.

The African Union Summit that was just held in Maputo, Mozambique, eloquently displays this attitude of ours. My delegation associates itself with the statement made on 24 September by His Excellency Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique, on behalf of the African Union. The Acting President clearly informed the international community about the resolve of the African continent to overcome current obstacles to building a new Africa in the areas of peace, security, democracy, human rights, economic development and regional integration.

It is precisely in this spirit that His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo, put forward his thoughts in a statement entitled, "For a Pan-African Pact against Aggression".

at the summit in Maputo, which constitutes a contribution to preventive diplomacy that will help to spare the African peoples the horrors of fratricidal strife and enable them to devote themselves exclusively and usefully to development objectives and a code of conduct between African States, lending timely support to the framework outlined by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. My country, which is the current acting President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CAEMC), takes such concerns to heart as it discharges its mandates in the management of various crises that are shaking our subregion.

We have already had the opportunity to deplore the fact that Central Africa suffers from the paradox of being both one of the richest subregions on the continent and one of the weakest zones in terms of human development indices. All the current initiatives of the leaders of the subregion are geared towards the resolution of this paradox. Thus, during the past year, significant progress had been registered in the various countries that have experienced, or are experiencing, armed crises — Angola, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo, the Central African Republic, Burundi and Chad. In the quest to resolve these crises, we have counted on the cooperation of diverse partners, especially the United Nations and African Union.

Allow me to briefly touch on some of the situations that require particular attention from the international community. With respect to Angola, while we welcome the return of peace in that country, ravaged for nearly three decades by civil war, we wish to urge the international community to help the Angolan authorities in their efforts at reconstruction. We continue to support the intention of the Angolan Government to submit for consideration at the present session a draft resolution on international assistance for the reconstruction and economic development of Angola.

We also welcome the positive developments under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, distinguished in particular by the establishment of transitional institutions and the deployment of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Ituri. We urge the international community to continue its support for the pacification and reunification process under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to further contribute substantively to the reconstruction programmes in place. I would like to reaffirm our steadfast wish to see this neighbouring and brotherly country find peace again, a guarantee for stability of the subregion.

I am also duty-bound to draw the attention of the international community to the situation in the Central African Republic, which has been confronted for years with serious and persistent economic, social and security problems. I would like to recall here that alarmed by this ever-worsening situation, CAEMC has established an ad hoc committee on the Central African Republic, presided over by His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Gabonese Republic. It has also deployed a peacekeeping force in that country. CAEMC's involvement in the Central African Republic, which has received much encouragement, particularly from the Security Council, mainly aims at the reconciliation of the Central African people, the pacification of the country and the prompt restoration of constitutional order. The holding of a Central African dialogue fits precisely in the framework of the recommended measures.

This country, which has suffered greatly these past years, truly needs assistance from the international community to regain peace, stability, economic growth and democracy. That is the meaning of the appeal made at Brazzaville on 17 May 2003 by the ECCAS Ministers at the meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

Still with respect to our subregion, I would like finally to stress in particular the crisis that raged in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe in July 2003. At that time, ECCAS, the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and Nigeria worked in perfect concert to re-establish the constitutional order shattered in this country on 16 July 2003. While we commend the contribution made by the United States and South Africa, we would like to appeal again for the entire international community to give substantial assistance to the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, particularly to the emergency programme that has just been established by the Government of this country.

We must also follow with great interest developments in Burundi, where every step forward

must be supported and encouraged to make the process irreversible. To that end, the international community is urgently called upon to make good on the financial commitments made during the conferences in Paris and Geneva.

The situations that I have just mentioned lead us to the relevant conclusions of the open Security Council meeting on 22 October 2002 on strengthening cooperation between the United Nations system and the Central African region in the maintenance of peace and security. At that meeting, we expressed our appreciation for the cooperation between our region and the United Nations while welcoming, inter alia, the work of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. We welcomed the multi-country programme of demobilization and reintegration put forward by the World Bank.

Since then, we welcomed the visit of the Security Council in June 2003 to the Great Lakes region and the multidisciplinary mission of the United Nations system, and we are eagerly awaiting its conclusions.

These conclusions will allow us to meaningfully participate in the future public debates of the Security Council on our subregion, one year after the meeting that elaborated a comprehensive, integrated, determined and concerted approach to the problems of peace, security and development of Central Africa.

Energized by that approach, we intend to participate in the international conference on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region. We intend to seize this historic opportunity to exorcise the demons of hatred and violence and lay the foundation for peaceful coexistence among our peoples and nations, which share a common destiny.

While reaffirming the central role that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has to play in that conference, I would like to stress that the Republic of Congo, my country, which is close to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in so many ways, would not understand if it had to attend as an observer at this crucial event. The same goes, by all accounts, for other neighbouring countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, such as Angola and the Central African Republic.

The issues of peace, security and building national unity were at the core of the Congolese authorities' concerns during the past year. It is in this framework that the 17 March 2003 agreement must be placed, thanks to which peace continues to reign throughout the entire territory.

Having regained peace, we are seeking to build on it each day, particularly by implementing the programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. We are also working towards the resettlement of internally displaced persons. It is not hard to fathom that these missions require considerable funding, which the Congo cannot provide alone. We would like to thank all our partners for their active solidarity.

We must still meet the great challenges of reconstruction, economy recovery, poverty reduction and the fight against HIV/AIDS, all sectors for which national strategies have been adopted. To implement this vast project, which we have called "The New Hope", we are mobilizing all the national forces capable of providing assistance to the State, including local government authorities, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector. In that framework, we have conducted negotiations with our external partners with a view to benefiting from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

All of these achievements can be implemented only in a world free from fear, as envisaged by the founders of our Organization, and as we believe today. This is why we wish to reiterate our faith and attachment to the United Nations, an irreplaceable framework and beacon of all hopes for peace for humanity, and which has never seemed more clearly necessary than today.

The President: I now give the floor to the Honourable Keliopate Tavola, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

Mr. Tavola (Fiji): Mr. President, my Government and country warmly congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of this fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. In presiding over the Assembly, Saint Lucia is setting an historic precedent for small island developing States, with the able support of its Caribbean Community (CARICOM) neighbours.

Fiji fully supports your chairmanship. We also recognize the successful leadership of your

predecessor, President Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic.

I wish to express my Government's deep condolences to the family of Mr. Vieira de Mello and of all the victims of the bombing at the United Nations in Baghdad last month. This was a brutal crime, which robbed the world of one of its most accomplished mediators and peacemakers. We hope that at this session, we can all come together, united, in our collective determination to rid the world of terrorism.

I come from a part of the globe that is isolated in the vast South Pacific. But that remoteness does not separate us from the international perils of the bomb, the gun and the hijacker. It does not insulate us against those bent on causing death and destruction to defend their interests or advance a cause. The fact is that every country and region is a potential target.

Members of the Pacific Islands Forum are joined with the United Nations in the search for a new order of peace and stability. That might seem an impossible task set against the tensions, the hatreds, the bloodshed and violence of the times. But, if we abandon it, we sell out the principles of the United Nations. We betray our countries, our peoples and generations to come.

Are we so inadequate and lacking in our understanding and abilities that we are incapable of coming up with new solutions to stop the spread of terror? It is not enough to simply strike out at the perpetrators. We must spend more effort and resources finding out what turns people towards violence to achieve a goal. We must tell ourselves that there is a different way, that the growing culture of violence and killing is not destined to be a permanent part of our world.

The United Nations needs to go to the root causes of this terrible phenomenon, which casts a very dark and menacing shadow over the first years of the twenty-first century. In the Pacific, we are concentrating on security issues, strengthening law and order and maintaining stability. A number of initiatives were taken during the last 12 months when our Prime Minister served as Forum chair.

Foremost among these initiatives was the ground-breaking decision to send a peace mission to the Solomon Islands in response to a plea for assistance from that country. The Solomon Islands had been wracked for several years by civil unrest, lawlessness and ethnic conflict. We in Fiji had a sympathetic appreciation of the difficulties facing those islands because of our own crisis in 2000. We were more than happy, therefore, to contribute to a task force to the Solomon Islands charged with bringing back order and re-establishing peace. A contingent of our troops, combined with others from Australia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and New Zealand, is now in the Solomon Islands working with the people there. We are encouraged by what our own soldiers and their comrades have been able to do so far to support a neighbour in distress. Our task is given extra significance through the close ties we enjoy with the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands mission has inevitably generated some controversy and debate about Australia's expanding involvement in our region. But let the record reflect that we endorse Australia's leading role in this intervention on the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government. One of its notable aspects is that it is multilateral. It was accomplished through the Pacific Islands Forum and has the unanimous support of the members. Beyond this, we know that the support and encouragement of the international community and the United Nations system will remain important, as work to build a credible law and justice system, an effective administration and a viable economic base continues.

Recent happenings have brought into question the value, the relevance and the future of multilateralism. Our position is that we understood the concerns, which led the United States to act in the way it did over Iraq. The date of 11 September 2001 was a shattering ordeal. It changed history and it changed America.

That said, Fiji declares an unwavering commitment to the concept of the world community working together, seeking the common path forward. We stand by the ideals of a multilateral, cooperative approach among nations. We welcome the decision by the United States to now seek United Nations involvement in Iraq's reconstruction.

In the Pacific, the Nasonini Declaration on regional security, adopted last year in Fiji, is a keystone of joint strategy. It followed the earlier Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation, aimed at countering transnational and organized crime.

The Forum countries will give higher priority to implementing legislative provisions to improve our

capacity for dealing with law enforcement and security challenges. Underpinning this is an Australian commitment, also approved by the Forum, to spend approximately $15 million over three years, to strengthen regional police forces. New Zealand has, additionally, agreed to put in $2 million. This important project is to be based in Fiji. A regional academy will provide training for about 900 police officers annually from Forum countries.

Fiji has been taking part in United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1978. This has come at a price. But, to us, serving world peace with our soldiers demonstrates that even the smallest States can play their part in minimizing and preventing conflicts. Currently, 635 Fiji personnel are on active duty in United Nations missions, apart from 123 soldiers and 15 police in the Solomon Islands. Our commitment to United Nations peacekeeping has not changed. It is a vital part of our foreign policy.

Fiji stresses the importance of strengthening multilateral treaties and conventions on disarmament and non-proliferation. Our country is one of those that want to see an effective global strategy for the control of small arms and light weapons.

During our Prime Minister's chairmanship of the Pacific Islands Forum, there was a deepening of the South Pacific region's engagement with development partners and international organizations. Heads of Government from member States enhanced their ties with France and Japan. They met in Tahiti with President Chirac and discussed many topics of common concern.

At a summit with Prime Minister Koizumi in Okinawa, they were able to reach and agreement on the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Millennium Development Goals and our own regional priorities, as a further basis for future collaboration.

The Pacific Islands Forum now has 12 dialogue partners, including the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Japan, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, India and Taiwan.

China — the emerging giant in world affairs and trade — has a steadily growing presence in our region. Its involvement and support for our economic and social development is welcome. We see definite scope for trade, investment, cultural and tourism links. China, many commentators believe, already has the world's second largest economy. Its present aid programme is significant and we expect it to grow substantially as bilateral relationships grow stronger.

At the same time, we place great value on our trade and commerce with Taiwan and value its assistance to our development. We look forward to the day when China and Taiwan peacefully resolve their long-standing differences.

We also welcome Japan's role and presence in the Pacific Islands region. Japan is an economic powerhouse and its increased role and contribution in promoting international security and development should be recognized by all Member States in allowing Japan a special place in the United Nations Security Council.

I am pleased to report that in Fiji and the region, there is more coordination in the effort to curb HIV/AIDS, the most terrible disease of our era. Although we have so far escaped the worst effects of HIV/AIDS, it is a real danger in the islands.

We expect to make substantial progress in our fight against this affliction, with support from Japan and France and an allocation from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. A programme financed by Australia provides $12.5 million for the regional campaign. Our Government will also make a larger HIV/AIDS allocation in next year's budget.

HIV/AIDS screening was recently at the centre of discussion in Fiji, when a suggestion was made for obligatory testing. Such a move was regarded by our Human Rights Commission as a rights violation. We must weigh the Commission's views carefully against the competing call for radical response to a national threat.

The Fiji Human Rights Commission is a product of our Constitution and its comprehensive bill of rights. The Commission is implementing a public education campaign to overcome a lack of awareness on rights issues. It also monitors Government and statutory authorities so that laws and policies conform to international human rights principles and the requirements of the Constitution. These generally reflect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by this Assembly in 1948.

As a former colony, Fiji is a late-starter in promoting human rights and civil liberties. Our Government's strategic plan to 2005 expresses very clearly where we stand. The plan was endorsed by a national economic summit and by Parliament. Please allow me to quote briefly from the plan:

> "The guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms for every citizen of Fiji and their equal protection under the law ... is an essential part of our vision for a peaceful Fiji. A feeling of personal security and of group security comes about when people have confidence that breaches of rights and freedoms will be dealt with impartially and speedily".

I quote further:

> "... Respect for the rights of others is a critical component of our freedoms guaranteed under the constitution. It is essential for peaceful existence in our multi-cultural society".

I emphasize these points because sometimes there are attempts to depict Fiji as a land where rights are habitually abused. Propaganda against our country has been circulated in some quarters here at the United Nations.

Much of this stems from opposition to our affirmative action policies designed to end social and economic inequalities. These are based on principles well-established internationally and are provided for in our Constitution.

It is self-evident that a country cannot grow in justice, harmony and prosperity when more than half of its population — in this case the indigenous Fijians — are largely outside the economy looking in.

All right-thinking people will agree that it is just and fair that this should be changed. But we constantly stress that this is not about taking from one group to give to another. It is about making the economy grow so that there is enough wealth to be shared equitably among our population. We want to give the Fijians a chance to catch up and compete in business and commerce.

Let it be noted that we have brought in laws to help the disadvantaged of all communities. This is a constitutional obligation. No one is being left out. That is the commitment we have made to our own population, and we now make to the international community.

Disparities and inequalities go to the very heart of the dispute which brought about the collapse of the Cancún talks. The failure of the talks underscores the deep differences which separate the poor countries from the rich in the battle to reform international trade. We acknowledge the ideal of free trade, but the stark reality is that there are many dangerous pitfalls for nations whose economies are weak and vulnerable.

It will be a long time before most developing States are ready to compete on that so-called level playing field. To them it is not level at all. Bring the barriers down completely and the full might of first-world commercial power will descend. What will that do to home-grown and emerging industries in poorer countries?

For the time being, countries like ours need preferences and special access for our economic survival. Think of it as a form of affirmative action to reduce that yawning chasm between the rich North and the poverty-stricken South. We now need to urgently consider where the World Trade Organization goes from here, and what can be done to salvage the wreckage of Cancún.

About three and-a-half years ago, my country came very close to anarchy. We had an armed insurrection, hostage-taking and violence. The Government of the day was overthrown. It was a time of extreme crisis for Fiji.

Now, I can stand before this Assembly to tell you that our nation is being reborn. Order and stability were restored and the first steps taken on a continuing journey of reconciliation. We had peaceful, democratic elections. Our Government is on a mission to build a Fiji where peace, multi-racial harmony and prosperity will always reign.

Our economic policy is to create more employment and wealth through high growth. We have increased Government investment in infrastructure and made a concerted and, to this point, successful effort to attract greater volumes of private capital. Many of the indicators are positive — apart from those relating to our sugar industry. This year, we expect to achieve an overall growth rate of more than five per cent.

This remarkable recovery could not have been achieved without the encouragement and support of

many friends of Fiji in the international community, and especially here at the United Nations.

I pay tribute to the role of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Labour Organization. The ILO is making a particularly valuable contribution at the moment with a plan to accelerate job creation.

To conclude, the "special case" of the small island developing States is calling for a "special response" of the global community, in further advancing our sustainable development efforts. The ten-year comprehensive review of the Barbados Programme of Action in Mauritius next year will provide the avenue for our development partners to make further commitments to our cause. Fiji is urging the international community to contribute to the success of this meeting.

Mr. President and fellow delegates, the United Nations is currently experiencing considerable strain and division, but it is for all of us to ensure that this Organization comes through the period of difficulty, strengthened and regenerated. The world needs the United Nations and what it stands for.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Abdi Hashi, chairman of the delegation of the Somali Republic.

Mr. Hashi (Somalia): Allow me first of all to sincerely congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte on his election as President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Your election to the presidency is a reflection of the high esteem the international community reserves for your country, Saint Lucia, and your good person.

At the same time, I would like to express our appreciation for the excellent manner in which your predecessor conducted the work of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Anan for his strong commitment to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and for defending so courageously the ideals on which this Organization is based.

The destruction of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, with its unnecessary loss of life, was a heinous crime against humanity and the United Nations. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his United Nations co-workers were in Iraq not as an occupying Power, but to serve and address the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. This despicable act is tantamount to cutting off the hand that feeds. We offer our sincere and profound condolences to Secretary-General Kofi Anan, the United Nations family and the bereaved families. In memory of the fallen, it is imperative for us, Member States, to accelerate ratification of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

The recent high-level meeting at United Nations Headquarters on the HIV/AIDS pandemic was of tremendous interest to the world and particularly to many countries in Africa. The AIDS scourge, having devastated entire communities, has also negatively impacted the economic development of countries. In order to combat this scourge, it is incumbent upon the international community to make more resources available, even in those countries where the incidence of the pandemic is reportedly low.

My country, Somalia, is reported to be one of those countries in Africa with a very low rate of infection. However, this should not lead us into complacency. Countries like Somalia have a unique chance to prevent the disease from spreading. An AIDS epidemic would be catastrophic for Somalia and seriously hamper efforts for peace and nation-building. It is therefore critical to put into place coordinated and strategic AIDS education and early response programmes to prevent the spread of the epidemic in Somalia. As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure.

Recent developments in the international arena present the United Nations with unprecedented challenges. Whether we succeed or fail will depend primarily on the manner in which we address these challenges. In our view, that should be through the United Nations. We have to reinforce the principles of the United Nations Charter through which we can further cement the pillars of international legitimacy on the basis of the equality of nations big and small, rich and poor, respect for the sovereignty of peoples, non-interference in each others' internal affairs, renunciation of the use of force in resolving conflicts, and respect for human rights.

There are Members of this Organization who violate these lofty principles with impunity. Israel is an example in this regard. Israel's continued occupation of Arab lands seized by war; its denying the Palestinian people their dignity; the daily killings of Palestinian children; the siege of the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people and calls by Israeli officials for his killing; and the suffering and daily humiliations inflicted on the Palestinian people are of great concern to the international community. We believe that these gross violations of international law are not in the interest of Israel or peace in the Middle East. We believe that the Arab initiative, which has the support of Arab States, provides a unique opportunity for achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and specifically between Arabs and Israelis.

The situation in Iraq continues to be of great concern. The people of Iraq need peace and development. The people of Iraq need to recuperate from the trauma of war and its aftermath. As a country that has witnessed war and its destruction, we know what the Iraqi people are going through. We empathize with them strongly. There must be a commitment from the international community to respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. The withdrawal of the occupying forces from Iraq as soon as possible and the establishment of a truly representative Government for Iraq based on a constitution acceptable to all Iraqis continue to be imperatives. In this regard, the United Nations can and must play the central role in bringing peace to Iraq.

A fresh wind is blowing throughout Africa, from the West of the continent to its Eastern and Central regions. This fresh wind is one of hope and peace not only for Africa, but also for the world. This wind of hope and peace needs to be nurtured and sustained by the international community.

We welcome the progress made in the search for peace in African countries — the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau. The latest and most welcome progress towards peace is the 22 September 2003 agreement signed in Naivasha, Kenya, by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army. We encourage the parties to resolve the remaining outstanding issues in a spirit of accommodation and mutual understanding. We also commend the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the United Nations and individual countries for their valuable assistance in bringing peace to areas of conflict in Africa.

I pause to share with the General Assembly the situation in my country, Somalia. We express our deep gratitude to the Government and people of Kenya for hosting us and for their perseverance. We strongly commend Kenya for its active role in promoting peace in Somalia. I also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable support for the peace process in Somalia. The IGAD Partners Forum, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and IGAD are to be commended for their firm commitment and input into this process.

The Somali National Reconciliation Conference at Mbagathi enters its twelfth month. A lot of ground has been covered during this period. A declaration on the cessation of hostilities has been adopted and the African Union has put in place a monitoring mechanism. Today, African Union monitors crisscross nearly all areas of Somalia to ensure the implementation of the declaration on the cessation of hostilities.

Equally important is the completion of the first two phases of the Conference. Despite such progress, we have been struggling with the last and crucial phase of the Conference for the past four months. This last phase envisaged the adoption of an interim charter, to be followed by the election of an interim head of State and the formation of an all-inclusive Government of Somalia. However, disagreements regarding the content of the interim charter and other important matters continue to persist. The provisions of the interim charter that raise the concerns of many touch upon the shape and very foundations of the reconstituted State of Somalia. It is for that reason that the Conference is currently in suspense and stalled, with the Transitional National Government and at least seven other groups refraining from participation.

Any interim charter for Somalia, in our view, must meet certain, basic criteria. First, it must have Somali ownership. Secondly, it must be the result of a fair and transparent process. Thirdly, it must have the support of the Somali stakeholders. Fourthly, it must be enforceable on the ground. Fifthly, it must reflect the

unity and indivisibility of the Somali nation. Finally, any Government that is established under this interim Charter should be an all-inclusive one. By the same token, any agreements reached in Kenya must be on a consensus basis, have the support of the Somalis as well as of the international community, and be enforceable on the ground.

To facilitate an agreement based on these criteria, a re-evaluation of the manner in which the Conference is currently being run is called for. The IGAD frontline States must observe the principle of impartiality and neutrality, without which no mediation can be taken seriously. Furthermore, the IGAD frontline States must confine their role to that of an active facilitator and attempts to fast-track the process with a view to reaching any agreement in haste and at any price must be discouraged.

In spite of the current difficulties, I am here to reiterate before this Assembly the sincere commitment of the Transitional National Government to the IGAD-led peace process for Somalia. I hereby state that the Transitional National Government will rejoin the peace conference in Mbagathi, Kenya, as soon as its concerns are fairly addressed. We do this not only for ourselves, but also for the Somali people, who have suffered so long. I submit that the solution lies in assisting the Somali parties to come to an agreement that is owned by all Somalis, rather than in imposing something against their will. We urge the international community to engage itself in the realization of this goal. We must all work together to ensure that the march to peace in Somalia is irreversible.

The international community has an obligation to re-engage in Somalia in a very serious manner and to re-enforce its role as a promoter of peace there at the Security Council and other levels, as it has done with other conflict areas in Africa. It is not enough to observe or to wait and see. Somalia needs serious sponsorship to push the peace forward. Finally, we urge the neighbouring countries of Somalia to scrupulously comply with the arms embargo imposed on Somalia by the Security Council. We strongly urge them to do so in the interest of peace and security in the subregion.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alfredo Cabral, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): You have assumed the presidency of the General Assembly, Sir, at a particularly critical time, when the applicability of rules, the reliability of mechanisms and even the authority of institutions have been called into question. We are now living through a period of uncertainty and questioning — uncertainty regarding the validity of certain fundamental principles that have been taken for granted and questions about the path to follow and the actions to be taken. Against such a difficult backdrop and at a time that is, to say the least, unpredictable, it is encouraging to know that we can count on your experience and myriad talents to guide our work. Guinea-Bissau is gratified by your election and congratulates you most warmly.

Our programme of work is a heavy one because once again we have been unable to draft an agenda that is more streamlined and less repetitive. As in the past, we will therefore be confronted by claims that are all equally legitimate; unfortunately, however, as always, rancour will occasionally raise its head. This demonstrates the extent to which you, Sir, will require the contribution of each and every one of us in order successfully to complete your mission. In this respect, I note with satisfaction that all delegations that have preceded us at this rostrum have assured you of their full support. You may rely on the full cooperation of the delegation of Guinea-Bissau. This is all the more true since you have established your mandate under the sign of action, for it is clear that it is indeed vigorous action that we shall need to convince those who today doubt the ability of the United Nations to meet their expectations.

We need resolute action to ensure respect for the principles and implementation of the objectives of the Charter. We need collective action to strengthen the United Nations capacity to resolve such urgent issues as poverty and hunger throughout the world, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the right to full enjoyment of human rights, control of weapons of mass destruction, and the deterioration of the environment, our most precious heritage, to name but a few. We need concerted, multilateral and vigorous action against terrorism and all those practices, finance, instigate or are involved in it and commit such cowardly and dastardly crimes as the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. We also need action to promote the adoption of urgent measures to guarantee the security of the Organization's personnel.

We need urgent and consistent action, too, designed to extinguish hotbeds of tension, resolve

I wish here and now to congratulate the Secretary-General on his leadership and dedication to the cause of peace and to hail the dignity, compassion and humanism that he demonstrated in the face of such a tragic ordeal as the brutal, wrongful and unforeseen deaths of colleagues and personal friends.

The United Nations, for the first time in a long while, has been bypassed — indeed, forced to take a back seat — in the management of a crisis, the nature and gravity of which required it to play its due role therein. Beyond the differences that emerged within the international community, and in particular among the members of the Security Council, regarding the right way to deal with an outlaw, recidivist and dangerous regime, the issue of Iraq once again highlighted the limitations of an Organization that, while universal, nevertheless depends on a small number of its Members. That is one of the reasons behind the many frustrations voiced year after year from this rostrum.

Our continent, Africa, still faces difficulties of all kinds. Poverty and endemic malnutrition are compounded by the agonies of HIV/AIDS, which continues to kill millions of individuals. There is also the growing number of conflicts and the proliferation of small arms, which pose an ongoing threat to the peace and stability of the countries of our continent.

This unfortunate picture is particularly accurate for West Africa, where several armed conflicts have erupted in recent years, with Liberia as their epicentre. Everyone is now aware of what some of us, the Republic of Guinea in particular, have been saying for years. The civil war in Liberia is contagious and the trigger of a series of crises and armed conflicts in the subregion. It has now touched countries that were once held up as examples of political stability and economic growth and were believed to be immune to such disasters.

My delegation should like to welcome the progress recently made in Liberia. The people of that country deserve finally to live in peace. It is a people that, as we all know, has suffered greatly from many years of war and destruction. We were also totally shocked to see all those children being used as cannon fodder in a war that was unjustified and unjustifiable. We also note with satisfaction the progress made in Sierra Leone. There, too, it was high time for peace to be restored. We are also pleased that our friends in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have finally

committed themselves on the path to progress and national reconciliation.

My country, Guinea-Bissau, has undergone some changes, the nature of which and the methods used to effect them have been subject to criticism, running the gamut from simple regret to formal condemnation. These are positions of principle that we understand and accept, for we have never ceased to proclaim our devotion to democracy and the rule of law. I recall here that my country was one of the first in Africa to wage an exemplary liberation struggle on behalf of freedom, human rights and democracy.

However, the sad realities of life, particularly when they are characterized by chronic and dangerous constitutional instability, can unfortunately lead to the overthrow of an existing regime specifically to prevent the exacerbation of social and political tensions in the country that could lead to confrontation or even civil war.

In Guinea-Bissau, a military committee decided to reflect in action the hopes for change of the majority of the population. Not a single shot was fired. No one in Guinea-Bissau has been arrested and I welcome the fact that the military has rejected any consideration of exercising power. In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the people have adhered to this movement, which has effected the changes they desired. Indeed, the people's support was total.

The members of the military committee for the restitution of the constitutional and democratic order were in fact acclaimed as genuine liberators. In Guinea-Bissau, we had been in an untenable situation. Our people, whose courage and dignity cannot be overemphasized, had had enough. They had reached the limit of what one can decently ask someone to put up with. I cannot sufficiently reiterate the extent to which our people deserve to be encouraged, supported and assisted.

Now that we have decided to turn the page, to look towards the future and to determine how we, the citizens of Guinea-Bissau, can be reconciled, unite our forces, create synergy and act together for the well-being of our people, the international community should intercede on our behalf and to provide the financial assistance we need. It is indeed financial assistance that we need, because our country and our State are destitute. We need international assistance to recover, to meet our challenges and to ensure that our people can eat. We need to see to it that those who chose freedom some 10 years ago can finally see it flourish, enjoy its benefits and understand why they fought and why they have a right to a decent and better life.

I should like to say here that, right now in our country, a process is under way that is bringing together all the vital forces of our nation. The political parties, the military committee and civil society — everyone has come together to meet the challenge as one and to answer the call of the people to join forces and work together. As I speak before this Assembly, the membership of the Government is under discussion. Thanks to concerted action and a professional and intensive analysis of the situation in our country, we have been able to adopt an interim charter that specifies all the stages required to restore as soon as possible the constitutional and democratic order that we and the international community wish to see return to Guinea-Bissau.

An Interim President has been chosen by consensus. This President is dedicated to working for the unity of the country. He intends to strengthen national unity and to serve as a catalyst so that we can return to our ideal of progress and freedom.

In conclusion, I should like to thank our brothers and sisters of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregion, who have striven to help us get back on our feet, discuss and find the most appropriate solutions to our problems. I thank first of all the Heads of State of Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria, who have visited Guinea-Bissau, as well as the ECOWAS ministers, who have never failed to support Guinea-Bissau. I also wish to note the assistance provided to us by the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, which dispatched the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Timor-Leste to advise us and to voice the solidarity of that linguistic community, to which we belong.

A country's national unity is its most precious asset. I cannot overemphasize that fact and I hope that I shall soon see democracy fully restored in my country. Above all, however, I wish to see the people of Guinea-Bissau happy. It is a proud and dignified people that has suffered in silence — a most eloquent silence — and that deserves the trust and assistance of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Martin Belinga-Eboutou, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Cameroon.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. You have set in motion a cycle of African presidencies of the Assembly — today, the African diaspora, tomorrow the African motherland. Your election attests to the high esteem in which the Member States hold your country, Saint Lucia, a traditional partner of Cameroon in the great African, Caribbean and Pacific family. It is also testimony to the trust that the representatives of those States place in you and your eminent diplomatic qualities. You may rest assured that my delegation will cooperate fully with you, as we have the pleasure of being a member of your Bureau in our capacity as Chairman of the Third Committee. Allow me to extend my wishes of success to the other members of the Bureau.

I also take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for the skill with which he guided our work at the last session.

To Secretary-General Kofi Annan, I wish to reiterate, in the context of the current international scene, Cameroon's expression of great pride and trust in him and his role as a facilitator in the settlement of inter-African conflicts. I thank him for his energetic and tireless activity in the service of the great ideals of the Organization.

Our Organization was created to preserve future generations from the scourge of war, to create conditions in which all can enjoy dignified lives, and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United Nations was created to ensure the reign of peace at the service of humankind. As Pope John XXIII recalled in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which was addressed to all men of good will and the fortieth anniversary of which we celebrate this year, that peace rests on four indispensable conditions corresponding to four specific necessities of the human spirit: truth, justice, charity and liberty. Our heads of State trod the same path at the Millennium Summit. They undertook to free humankind from warfare and poverty, to promote human rights and to strengthen the United Nations. We felt that it would be useful to recall those principles because the picture of the world that has emerged in this general debate since 23 September is not a very optimistic one.

On 19 August, the United Nations was struck by tragedy. The terrorist attack that destroyed the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad and struck and killed dozens of innocent victims, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, posed a great challenge to the principles and values that are the bedrock of our Organization. At the time, President Paul Biya expressed on behalf of Cameroon expressed his profound indignation and firmly condemned that odious, criminal act. Tomorrow, we will weep with the people of Iraq for the tragic death — again in Baghdad — of Akila Al-Hashemi, a highly talented diplomat and eminent member of the Iraqi Governing Council.

Cameroon is proud that our Organization did not shirk its responsibilities or even weaken in its resolve to play a central role in the stabilization, orderly restoration of the sovereignty and reconstruction of Iraq and to support the political process under way. Following upon the long series of terrorist acts committed throughout the world since the tragedy of 11 September 2001, the 19 August attack in Baghdad was a timely reminder of the vulnerability of our world today. The complexity of the challenge and the gravity of the danger require us to step up our collective efforts effectively to confront terrorism, which today poses perhaps the most serious threat to international peace and security. Cameroon again calls for a high-level conference to be convened to define a collective organized response by the international community to terrorism.

In addition to new threats to international peace and security, such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, there are other, equally dangerous, threats: all sorts of pandemics, including HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and despair stemming from almost endemic poverty.

Therefore, our joint mobilization should be aimed primarily at reducing or even eliminating the germs and causes of conflicts and despair.

In the Middle East, we must demand that the parties to the conflict — Israel and Palestine — return without delay to the negotiating table to agree on modalities conducive to the rapid and comprehensive implementation of the road map. Cameroon regrets and condemns the escalation of violence, which is seriously

endangering any peaceful solution based on the letter and spirit of Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), adopted with no vote against. In it the Council affirmed

> "the vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders".

Our Palestinian and Israeli friends must get used to the idea that they are condemned to live side by side, to coexist in the geopolitical configuration forged by their rich, common history. To that end, Israelis and Palestinians will have to disarm — of course, in terms of weapon policies, but primarily disarm at the cultural level by unanimously and sincerely ridding their hearts of fear and the psychosis of war. The axiom that peace results from a balance of war-making ability and weapons should be replaced by the principle that real peace can be built only on mutual trust.

The same applies to the peoples of the renowned Mesopotamia, who are emerging from three decades of tyranny, and must very soon, with the help of the international community, have their full dignity and sovereignty restored in a stable and prosperous Iraq, living in peace with all its neighbours.

Over the past year, the many conflicts that have bloodied Africa have remained at the centre of the concerns of the United Nations, which has made many efforts to end them. Fortunately, those efforts are beginning to yield results. Some African conflicts are on the way to being resolved, nourishing new and legitimate hopes. Unfortunately, despite everything, there are still deplorable situations where the protagonists are having trouble finding a negotiated political solution or keeping their commitments. We are convinced that there will soon be results, given genuine political will on the part of the major actors. The irreplaceable support they receive from the United Nations deserves to be welcomed and recognized.

Africa in general and our subregion in particular are fully aware of the role this important partner plays in our economic development, in consolidating democracy and the rule of law, and, finally, in promoting peace and security within and outside our countries. That is why the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have forcefully expressed their desire to strengthen their cooperation with the United Nations through a political presence of that Organization in the subregion, which would bolster our subregional capacities, particularly in the area of peace and security.

In that connection, Cameroon reiterates its thanks to the Secretary-General for sending a multidisciplinary mission to Central Africa last June at the request of the members of the Security Council. We await with interest its innovative recommendations, which will shortly be made to the Security Council. They will nourish the debate to be held in this Hall on the agenda item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States".

We welcome the Secretary-General's suggestions concerning the functioning of the Organization in this constantly changing world. We will fully support any reform that will bring the Organization closer to our peoples, as envisaged by the measures for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and Central African organizations.

In the Millennium Declaration, the political leaders of the world committed themselves to creating a world partnership for development and to respond to the special needs of Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), whereby Africa has decided to take back the initiative and to control its own fate, can serve as a sound platform for a fruitful partnership between the continent and the international community.

Africa is waiting for multiple responses. One, which will play a decisive part in the growth of our continent, is linked to trade. What African States want and aspire to is to play a more important part in the trade of goods and services. That implies in particular standards favouring fair competition.

The failure of the recent World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held at Cancun has raised grave doubts, particularly among African countries that export agricultural products. The tremendous reluctance of wealthy nations to dismantle their agricultural subsidy regimes is puzzling, and seriously threatens the survival of African economies based on agriculture and livestock. The subsidies given to that sector are stifling millions of farmers and cotton producers in Central and West Africa.

In the same context, Mr. President, your country, Saint Lucia, and Cameroon have been carrying out an epic battle for almost a decade for the survival of our

banana industries, which are up against the giants of the sector.

There are many more examples of the need for solidarity and urgent reform of the multilateral economic system. We hope that the Doha round will not deviate from its main objective — development — and that it will take well into consideration the concerns of the poorest in order to integrate them promptly into the global economy.

Globalization does not relate only to trade. It also affects human development and new technologies, the protection of the ecosystem and the sustainable development of water and other natural resources. All of those aspects require a concerted approach, given that the sacrifices of some work to everyone's advantage. Cameroon, which has chosen, for example, to participate in rational and sustainable management of the world forest ecosystem, has established a bold national environmental management plan.

It is clear that, in order to effectively implement such policies without exposing its rural populations to extreme poverty, our country needs significant financial assistance, particularly to diversify its production and to ensure systematic transformation of its natural resources. In other words, today, more than ever before, solidarity should rhyme with partnership — and globalization with fair trade — to ensure the comprehensive and orderly development of our world.

The United Nations assuredly remains the only universal Organization that not only possesses the necessary competencies and impartiality, but is also the only entity that can confer legitimacy on any multilateral action tackling the great world challenges, a number of which we have just listed. To attain these noble objectives, it urgently needs to consider in depth its current approaches, the way it operates and its implementing mechanisms.

Cameroon unreservedly supports the Secretary-General's initiative to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities to consider ways to strengthen the United Nations. We hopefully await their contribution to the Organization's necessary and unavoidable reform to improve its performance, including its missions of an economic and social nature as well as international peace and security.

The Secretary-General invites us to go further along the path of reform, to which he has been committed for several years. He is right. What is at stake is the Organization's very effectiveness, which it needs to tackle the great challenges of our time. He can count on Cameroon's support.

As I have been concluding my remarks, the light has changed from green to yellow and from yellow to red. How can one refrain from prolonging his comments when it is a question of humanity and humanity's future through peace, a negotiated peace, a concerted peace, a peace that rests on justice and the equitable distribution of benefits and wealth?

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmad Chalabi, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Chalabi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today I stand before the Assembly representing the voice of the Iraqi citizen who long suffered from cruelty within and outside his homeland. Those within his country inflicted on him the worst kinds of torture: they attacked his honour, assaulted his family, humiliated him, shackled him, oppressed him and forced him into miserable wars. His brothers and his friends in the region not only remained silent, ignored him and turned a blind eye to his catastrophe, they also criticized and faulted him the moment he dared to speak up. And throughout the world, those who stood to benefit scrambled to do business and cooperate with his torturer.

Very few accepted and spoke the truth, very few considered the catastrophe of their fellow human being and declared that he was a victim. He heard no response to his appeals. So the Iraqi citizen remained lost and doubly persecuted — first, with the injustice of the sword with which the dictatorial regime attacked him at home, and then with the injustice of criticism — a more painful affliction — from many abroad. But the Iraqi citizen did not give up. Rather, he was persistent and patient, and he continued his struggle through his thoughts, words and actions to achieve liberation, the ideal for which he had always yearned most.

I stand today before the Assembly expressing to Members to the best of my ability the voice of this Iraqi individual, declaring with him and on his behalf the end of silence. I ask each Member present here to listen to him.

I come today to present the Assembly with four essential truths and to demonstrate, through those truths, two fundamental rights.

The first truth is that Iraq's long, dark night has ended. The bitter experience of humiliation, oppression, suppression, and dictatorship that the Iraqis endured for more than three decades has ended. It ended with the fleeing of the head of the regime, along with his cronies, and with the collapse of the symbols that he had erected in Baghdad and throughout Iraq.

The second truth is that the liberation of Iraq — and what took place was indeed liberation — could not have been achieved had it not been for the resolve of President George W. Bush and the commitment of the coalition, headed by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The Iraqis will never forget their sacrifices and the courage they displayed in Iraq's liberation. If today we hear the voices of those who question the intentions of the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom in undertaking the liberation, we invite them to come to visit the mass graves, the drained marshes and the gassed city of Halabja, and to examine the list of the missing whose right to life was taken from them by the regime.

The third truth is that the liberation embodied a universal Iraqi national resolve. The liberation came as a result of vigorous Iraqi efforts to oppose the deposed regime during many long years when hundreds of thousands of martyrs were sacrificed. The martyr Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim and his companions — may God rest their souls — were not the last victims; they added another page to the annals of Iraqi bravery on 29 August, the day of the Iraqi martyr. Nor was death by treachery spared the martyr Akila al-Hashemi.

The fourth truth is that the removal of the regime was only the prelude to the birth of a new Iraq. The birth that has been prepared for by so many faithful Iraqis, both at home and abroad, is at hand.

A unique experience awaits us in Iraq today. We will succeed through our desire to do good, to achieve development and to let freedom spread and flourish. I stand here today to confirm that, with God's help, we in Iraq will accept nothing short of success. Iraqis are capable of succeeding, and they want to succeed. We will not allow a gang of mercenaries and terrorists to deprive the Iraqi citizen, the Iraqi society and the Iraqi nation of a bright tomorrow.

The land of the two rivers, the cradle of civilization, the land of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon and Assyria, the land of peace, the land of the caliphate and the house of wisdom, the home of the Code of Hammurabi and the storehouse of accumulated knowledge, literature, poetry and intellectual achievement is dependent, first and foremost, on its human resources more than on its natural and oil resources.

On the basis of its human resources, Iraq can undergo a qualitative sea change, moving it from the grip of totalitarianism and fear to stability, prosperity and tolerance. What the international community puts into Iraq will be returned many times over. Put your confidence in Iraq and receive from it stability and prosperity. Not only would stability and prosperity be Iraq's but they would spread to the rest of the region and the entire world.

The Iraq that we want to see is the Iraq of the innovative individual. More than 60 per cent of Iraq's population is below the age of 20. Our first priority in preparing those young people for the twenty-first century is to give them cultural and educational values that will enable each of them to prove themselves and their particularities in a new Iraq.

In the past in Iraq, as in other nations that suffered under the ideologies of the twentieth century, the individual was suppressed by the masses, the masses by the revolution, the revolution by the party, and the party by the leader. The result was that the human being was lost under continuous layers of negation that obliterated his individuality, making him an object for consumption in an ostensible defence of the nation and in the name of the revolution, or to be sacrificed, body and soul, for the leader. The concerns of Iraqis are no different from those of all other peoples of the world. Iraqis are eager to define themselves and to project their singularity. The Iraq of tomorrow must recognize the individual citizen as the basis of sovereignty and the starting point for legislation.

The rights of the individual are fundamental; the rights of the group derive from them. Iraqis, like other peoples, insist on their right to dignity, freedom, justice and peace. The assertion of such rights will build the foundations of tomorrow's Iraq. The dignity of every Iraqi, without exception, must be guaranteed, without consideration for social status, political position or economic situation. An accused person will not lose his

dignity, even if found guilty. We will begin with dignity because the previous regime worked futilely to convince Iraqis that their dignity was an endowment from the ruler. Today, we stress that the dignity of the entire nation stems from the dignity of each citizen.

As with dignity, so with freedom. Freedom is not a gift from the rulers or the State. Rather, it is a basic principle, the essence of a human being. Responsible freedom that does not impinge upon the liberties of others is the core of the social contract. Despite the excesses of outsiders and infiltrators since the fall of the repressive regime, Iraqis have proved to themselves that freedom means neither chaos nor the law of the jungle.

The individual has an instinct for freedom, and thus he demands justice. The previous regime undermined justice and transformed it into a tool of the State to oppress and suppress the people. The new Iraq will be based on a firm justice system that ensures the independence and integrity of the judiciary. After the senseless wars that destroyed innumerable lives, leaving disaster in their wake, the new Iraq will adopt a new defensive policy based on peace. Iraq will be an activist for peace for the region and the world. The aforementioned four truths will form the foundation of Iraq's political future.

Iraq will abide strictly and explicitly by all human rights instruments, beginning with the Declaration of Human Rights, guaranteeing the right of man to life, property and the pursuit of happiness.

We pledge that Iraqi laws and legislation apply equally to all the people. No person will be above the law for any reason, regardless of merit or individual responsibility. Indeed, there will be no distinction on the basis of religion, sect, race, language, ethnicity, gender, class or tribe. The defunct regime exploited those divisions for its own ends. The new Iraq will rely on justice and fairness.

Iraqi women are capable of innovative excellence and productivity and can take on all the responsibilities of the nation. It is the duty of society and the State to remove any obstacles in their way.

The constant dialogue that is required between Iraqi citizens and the State that represents and serves them will take place on the basis of an honest, democratic and representational system. This system is based on the principle of the separation of powers, and firmly upholds elections as the ultimate arbiter. We are not concerned with the dressings of democracy, but with the safety of the political system as the incarnation of the democratic spirit.

The pillars of this system are, first and foremost, the separation of powers in the framework of a written constitution that avoids duplication in the judicial, legislative and executive powers. That will provide a sound basis for each to oversee the other. Secondly, accountability will be ensured as a result of such supervision and by means of elections that will provide for the participation of individuals in politics. Finally, civil society will be empowered by means of a free press, unions and independent institutions, which will act as monitors and critics and represent the plurality of political forces in the country.

The third pillar is the upholding of transparency as a fundamental principle, based on the sovereignty of the individual citizen. The State exists to serve, and is answerable to the citizen, who is entitled to inquire into its affairs. The State does not have the right to withhold information on its affairs. The fourth pillar is recognition by the minority of the right of the majority to assume power, and the respect by the majority of the rights of the minority. Here, it is important to distinguish between a political majority and minority and a factional majority and minority. Political majorities and minorities are determined by the ballot box, not by a population census or random correlations. No one has the authority to arrogate to himself a political right on the basis of a presumed factional majority. We do not want a political, sectarian or national allocation in Iraq. A sound representative, federal political system can best express the interests of all Iraqi citizens in a manner that reflects their religion, creed, ethnicity or language.

The previous period was characterized by restricting all power to an abusive few in Baghdad, but tomorrow's Iraq will be based on the principle of local authority in the context of a federal union. Federalism as construed by Iraqis is not based on the division of the homeland; rather, it is a way of empowering and rehabilitating those living in different regions to take direct responsibility for their affairs in their own regions, without constant interference from the central Government.

Our constitution charts the relationship between integrated and continuous local and national

authorities. We rely on the federal system, as we do on the democratic system, because we have a clear understanding of the relationship between the State and its citizens. This relationship is not one of guardianship, because the Iraqi citizen is not a minor and is therefore not in need of the State's interference in all his affairs. Our concern is to ensure that this relationship is based on care, with the State being the vigilant servant of the citizen, and on nurturing in some areas, especially with regard to the provision of education and social and health services for young people.

Complementing our belief in federalism, and in contrast with the vain and false nationalist excesses of the previous regime, we declare that Iraq is one nation, permanent and whole.

Nothing in this declaration belittles the continuity of our Arab and Muslim heritage, or contradicts the sentiments of many Iraqis about their own culture and national identity. Rather, it confirms that all the territory of Iraq — from its mountains in the far north to its marshes and the Gulf in the extreme south, including its rivers, plains and deserts — is a lasting, indivisible unit. This is an expression not only of the true beliefs of most Iraqis, but also of a key political principle and point of reference that will help the country recognize realities on the ground and avoid further upheaval.

While we seek to strengthen the rule of law and institutions of governance, we wish to make clear that authority emanates from the citizen who occupies the political position not from the political post itself. There must be a legal foundation in this respect, and decisions must not be taken because of the whims or opinions of a person in authority. The previous regime issued many arbitrary rules, regulations and decisions based on one man's views. The alternative in tomorrow's Iraq will be the application of the rule of law through sanctioned legislative authority that reflects the will of the Iraqi people, through an independent judiciary and under the supervision of an elected legal body.

Last but not least, let me touch on the relationship between religion and State in the new Iraq. Islam is the religion of the overwhelming majority of Iraqis. It is vital to the Iraqi identity as well as to the State and the nature of governance. In any case, the great civilizational heritage and rich cultural repository of Islamic jurisprudence is, no doubt, one of Iraq's assets, and we will benefit from it through a judiciary that is based on equality and pluralism.

Let me point out a truth that is often overlooked: that the State, during the previous century, used religion for its own ends and took from it what suited those who had usurped power. They rejected the independence of institutions and of religious centres, taking over the Awqaf and imposing a religious terminology that suited their own interests, at the expense of those of others. In Iraq, religion is one of the most important assets of the individual and of society. We will not abandon it in any area, or reject its judicial, intellectual, behavioural or daily implications. We call for the rehabilitation of all religious institutions by enabling them to reassume their responsibilities in protecting Iraqi citizens who seek their moral and spiritual guidance without hypocritical political involvement.

These are the main guidelines for what we want for our country.

Our right today is to demand help and assistance from the world, thanking all those who stood by the Iraqis in their darkest hour and forgiving those who inadvertently did not stand with us. It is important for all nations of the world to acknowledge that what happened in Iraq — past atrocities and today's reconstruction — reflects an ongoing and dramatic historical event. The international community must stand shoulder to shoulder with us. That is what we ourselves want and what we want from others on the road to a free, just and peaceful Iraq.

We want an Iraq in which unity and plurality are two sides of the same coin. We want an Iraq that returns sovereignty to the individual citizen, not to the leader. We want an Iraq that is secure in its cultural and religious identity and engaged in open dialogue with the world. We want an Iraq that embraces its past while looking to the future — an Iraq that is at peace with itself, its neighbours and with the world. We want an Iraq that will eradicate all Ba'athists once and for all, bring all their officials to justice and prevent them from assuming power again.

(*spoke in English*)

I stand before the Assembly as the representative of a free Iraq. To all those here who helped us in our struggle for liberation, we extend our gratitude. Our

liberation would not have been achieved without the determination of President George W. Bush and the commitment of the coalition, at the forefront of which stand the people of the United States of American and Great Britain. The Iraqis will never forget their courage and sacrifice on our behalf.

To those who stood with the dictator and who continued to question to intentions of the American and British Governments in undertaking this liberation — we invite you to come and visit the mass graves where half a million of our citizens lie. Come and visit the dried-up marshes. Come and visit Halabja, where chemicals were dropped on civilians. Come and examine the lists of the disappeared, whose right to life was taken from them by Saddam Hussain, and we, the Iraqi people, will ask you why you chose to remain silent. We are here today to declare that a new Iraq has been born — an Iraq in which dignity, justice and human rights are assured for all citizens, an Iraq at peace with its people, its neighbours and the world, an Iraq that stands ready to regain its rightful place in the international community of free and proud nations.

Statement by the President

The President: We have come to the end of the general debate of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. It is noteworthy that this session attracted the highest level of participation since the Millennium Summit. Among the 189 speakers, the Assembly heard 50 heads of State, 27 heads of Government and 94 Deputy Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers.

I express my sincere appreciation to every head of State or Government, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for their active participation, their constructive contribution to the debate and their support for my stated priorities.

When I opened this general debate, I indicated that I would be listening carefully to the priorities identified by high-level participants, which would provide the framework for the Assembly's work. What I have heard gives a clear indication of where Member States are on many of the critical issues that will be before the Assembly.

There was resounding support in the general debate for multilateralism and for the reaffirmation of the United Nations as the primary international Organization to address critical global problems. In fact, many expressed the view that, in these unsettled times, the United Nations and multilateralism were needed now more than ever.

The central role of the General Assembly as advocate and as a supervisory and policy-making body was a point consistently made. However, continuing revitalization efforts were urged, in order to permit the Assembly to deal effectively with challenges both old and new.

Development and the prosperity of countries and regions received much attention from high-level representatives. They supported the view that the fifty-eighth session should give appropriate focus to issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, equity in the global economic system and the preservation of the environment. The regrettable outcome of the Cancún round of negotiations gives new impetus to calls for full consideration of development issues by the General Assembly, including the Millennium Development Goals. Some speakers reminded us that the outcome of the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, set for 29 and 30 October 2003, will be critical to the work we will do in the area of development. Therefore, we expect wide representation and high-level participation in the High- Level Dialogue.

Strong support was expressed for the 10-year review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. This should augur well for the successful review and implementation of its outcome.

Considerable attention was given to Africa's development needs, as well as to the requirement to keep these matters high on the Assembly's agenda. Many stressed the need for continued international support for the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and for cooperation and support to bring peace and stability to the African continent.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his report on the work of the Organization, gave us thought-provoking insights into his priorities for the coming year. In this context, we have noted the Secretary-General's proposals on United Nations reform, including the establishment of a high-level panel of eminent persons to review these matters for our consideration.

Security Council reform continued to command attention. The general view was that the Assembly should continue this work, notwithstanding the fact that efforts made in this area for more than a decade had not yielded any tangible results.

I do not recall a statement in which the situation in post-war Iraq and the need to urgently address all its aspects were not emphasized as a priority for the United Nations. This was an area in which general support was expressed for initiatives to bring relief to the people of Iraq and to permit them to take responsibility for their own future.

Almost without exception, all condemned the brutal attack on the United Nations premises in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 and the loss of life and injury to United Nations staff. It was agreed that the attack was the latest and most formidable challenge to the United Nations and to the security of United Nations staff. There was support for the Secretary-General's initiative to review the matter of safety and security of United Nations staff.

The situation in the Middle East was considered to be a matter of grave concern. It was thought that the General Assembly could send a strong message to both sides in the conflict — Israel and Palestine — to put an end to bloodshed and violence. Implementation of the proposed road map was seen by many as a viable means of bringing long-lasting peace to the Middle East.

The one-day high-level plenary on HIV/AIDS, which took place on 22 September 2003, immediately preceding the general debate, was considered by all to have been both constructive and productive. The views expressed in both the plenary and the interactive debate underscored the need for a cooperative approach in addressing this most devastating pandemic.

Those are my brief, personal observations of salient issues raised in the general debate, which I thought I should share with the Assembly. As I reviewed the many statements, I was struck by the common ground among speakers over a wide range of issues. This makes me hopeful that we will be able to do good work in the General Assembly during the fifty-eighth session.

Our leaders have given direction to the work we are to do, and political support for it. We must now carry forward the commitments they have made, if the hopes and aspirations expressed are to be realized.

Let me conclude by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly for their assistance and cooperation in the conduct of the work of the general debate. I wish also to thank the dedicated Secretariat staff, particularly those who have worked with me, and to commend them for their support and cooperation.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 9?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.